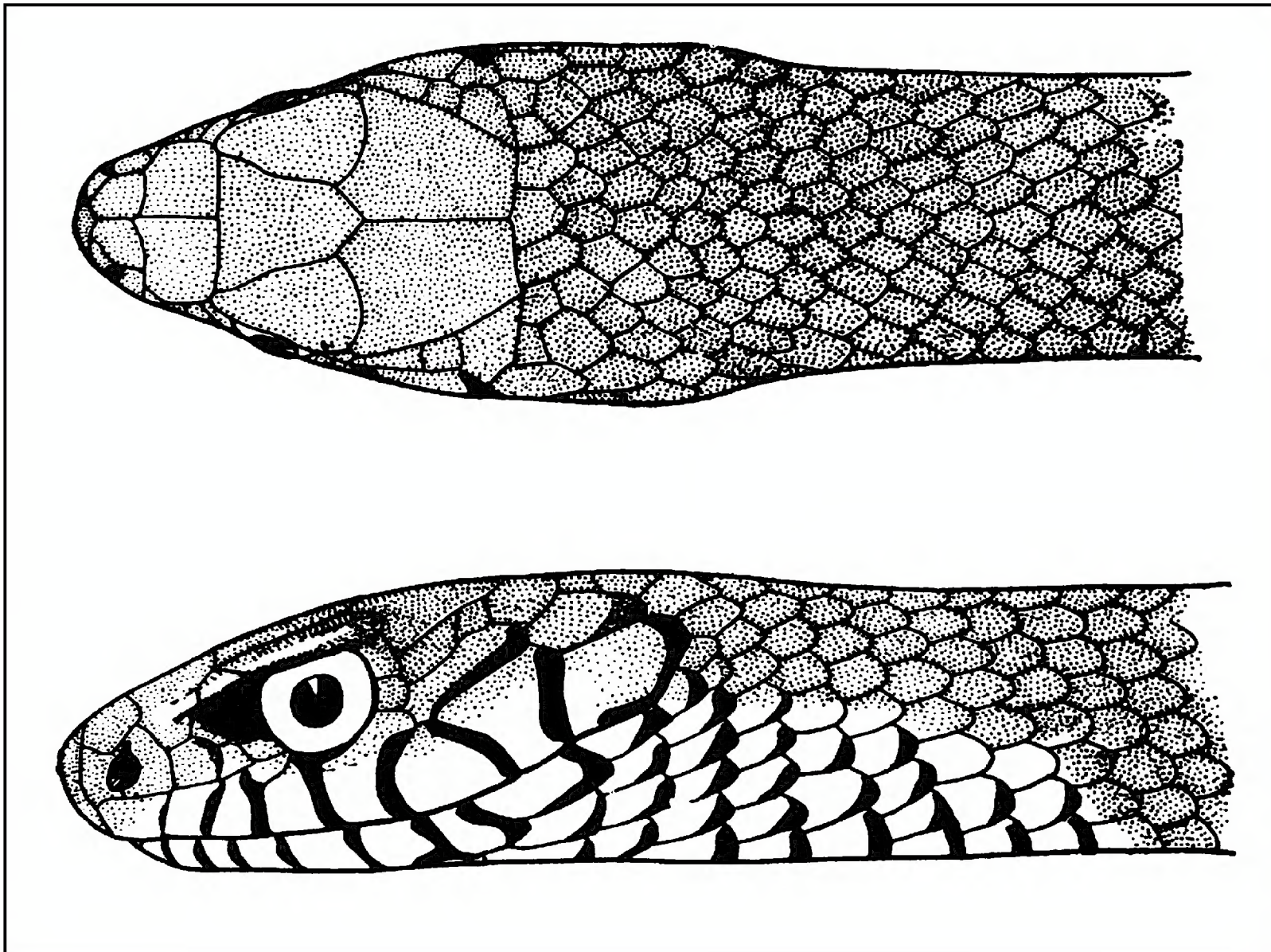

BULLETIN

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Chicago Herpetological Society



Volume 36, Number 3
March 2001



BULLETIN OF THE CHICAGO HERPETOLOGICAL SOCIETY
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Searching for Herps in Mexico in the 1930s — III

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Part Four — 1935 Alone

Knowing my eagerness to collect in Mexico, Ed Taylor staked me to a long summer collecting trip there by train, traveling by myself except for a brief period when he joined me for work primarily in Chiapas. Notes exist for only the first few days of that trip, as follows.

On June 5, 1935, I stood impatiently beside my baggage in the inspection room at the railway station in Nogales, Sonora. For fifteen minutes I had been standing there, waiting for one of the officials to inspect my belongings. I was becoming antsy because in another fifteen minutes my train was scheduled to leave. Time would not have seemed so precious had the train arrived at Nogales on time, but it was an hour late, leaving relatively little leeway before its scheduled departure. In desperation, I called upon one of the numerous *cargadores* [porters] to speed matters up, and being well trained in compensated facilitation, he managed almost immediately to pry loose an official who rummaged hurriedly through my suitcase, a small steamer trunk and a lantern box. Sealing each article and warning me at the same time not to break the seals until I left the city, I was cleared for boarding the train. My *cargador* hastily got the trunk into the baggage car, and me into the proper chair car, with two minutes to spare. I congratulated myself upon making it before the deadline, while numerous other passengers were still awaiting attention in the inspection room.

I had much to learn, for the train did not leave on schedule. It was about an hour later that it finally departed. By that time I had also learned that second class chair cars, such as mine, were truly second class. The first class cars were provided with upholstered chairs comparable with those in day coaches of U.S. trains, but the second class cars had only wooden benches. I was surrounded by piles of vegetables, candy, large straw hats and big baskets of miscellany on paired benches facing each other on each side of the central aisle. The bench seats were formed of two-inch wooden slats an inch apart, and were quite uncomfortable after a long period.

My fellow travelers changed rapidly, a few new faces appearing and as many leaving at each stop. The crowd that got on at Hermosillo was rather boisterous. There were only fifteen or twenty individuals, but most seemed to know each other. They bought beer from an agent who kept a supply in a big box occupying all of the last seat in the car, and their spirits rose steadily as the night wore on. A strong wind soon blew clouds of dust through the open windows, until eventually it became difficult to see and breathe. One of the revelers closed all of the windows, but the stifling heat was even worse, hence the windows were again opened. Everything in the car was covered with dust, and there was nothing anyone could do about it.

It was a great relief when, late that night, the conductor

shouted “Corral.” It was the first station I had selected for collecting. I saw the baggage men drop my trunk off the express car, and then watched as the train pulled out of sight. I then looked around for the station, or the town, or both, but there was nothing to be seen. All was inky black. I could not even see my trunk. Then a flashlight turned on. One other passenger had gotten off there. As the flashlight started to disappear, I shouted out to him “Do you know where there is a hotel?” “There isn’t any.” “Well, where can one stay?” “I’ll show you. You can stay with me.” We carried our trunks up onto the platform of a tiny, wooden station house, and then walked in silence with our smaller luggage to a house a few hundred feet away. The lady of the house was awakened and asked to furnish us a bed. She led us to a single-roomed annex, thatch-roofed and bamboo-sided, where she pulled out two large cots. A grass mat was thrown on each, and the bed was ready. As she left us she cautioned us about the scorpions that might fall on us from the roof. None fell, to our knowledge, and fortunately there were no mosquitoes or other such insects because we were about a mile from the nearest river, the Río Yaqui. Exhausted, we slept well despite the hardness of the bed.

Anxious to begin collecting as soon as possible, I started out early the next morning with my rifle. By noon I had as many lizards as desired, and that afternoon I searched the town for cans and formalin, both of which I had intended to buy as needed. On previous trips we had depended heavily upon empty, one-liter candy cans, which seemed to be pretty widely available and were wide-mouthed, and in addition we bought formalin from drug stores. Neither could be obtained here. In lieu of cans, I managed to find a glass-stoppered, wide-mouthed glass jar to keep the specimens in at least temporarily. But I was at a loss to find preservatives until a boy offered to walk to La Esperanza, five miles away, for thirty cents. I gladly accepted the offer, and he brought back a pint, sufficient for the immediate needs.

It had been my hope to take the motor car railway from Corral to Tonichi, which I suspected would be in mountains that would yield interesting specimens. However, I was told that Tonichi was even smaller than Corral, and I reasoned that if I could find no cans or formalin in Corral I certainly would not be able to do so in Tonichi. So the proposed side trip was shelved.

Even Corral was not a particularly propitious collecting site. Nothing for miles around broke the level monotony of the open, flat, semi-arid desert, except along the Río Yaqui. Along this steep-banked river, which in western Chihuahua has carved a monstrous canyon a thousand feet deeper and more spectacular than the Grand Canyon, vegetation was dense. The inhabitants of Corral frequently bathed and did their laundry in the river. The only reptile I found along the river that was not on the plains, however, was the little tree lizard,

Urosaurus ornatus. Many of them populated the sides and roofs of the quaint, rustic shacks near the river.

On the plains, lizards were scarce. The most spectacular were the desert iguanas, *Dipsosaurus dorsalis*, about a foot long and exceedingly wary. They had the habit of running a long distance when startled, then ducking behind a bush. I would follow cautiously, while the lizard peeked from its shelter. If approached directly, the lizard would run ahead and hide behind another. If, however, I passed to one side, perhaps appearing oblivious to it, it would usually remain motionless. Once past the bush, I could then turn and fire at the lizard, providing it had not taken alarm upon seeing me stop and turn toward it.

I soon had enough of these and other lizards to fill my jar. I could do no more collecting until more containers and formalin were available. Accordingly I packed my belongings and took the first train south to Tepic, where I was sure cans and formalin would be available.

Unfortunately, the day I decided to leave, the train that passed through was a mixed passenger and freight. Mixed and passenger trains ran south on alternate days. The mixed trains were just as comfortable as the passenger trains, but ran on a much slower schedule, stopping at every station however small, and frequently remaining for long periods for loading and unloading freight.

Again I was in the second class section. As the long hours passed I squirmed this way and that on the hard seats, and in the process inadvertently kicked over the bottle of formalin specimens, cracking the jar. I set it upright immediately, but the fluid inevitably continued to seep out the crack, running in little streams on the floor. Soon the people around me began to sniffle and wipe their eyes. Windows were opened and others moved to the opposite end of the car. Soon I was alone in my end, surrounded by a puddle of strong formalin whose fumes caused even me to shed tears. A conductor passed through, noticed the cause of the trouble, and immediately flew into a rage, demanding to know what the fluid was and whether it was poisonous. I assured him that it would do no harm, but he was adamant that the bottle be thrown out. Naturally I did not want to lose the specimens, but he demanded that either it goes or I go. He left me to think it over, and when he returned a few minutes later all was in order. I had mopped up the floor with an old towel, and had thrown it and the empty bottle out the window. The lizards I had wrapped in a dirty shirt and stashed away in my suitcase along with my other clothes. All was well except for the fact that for several days every change of clothes reeked of formalin.

So ends the 1935 narrative, scarcely started.

Part Five — 1936 with Thomas

The 1936 collecting trip was the longest yet, entering Mexico July 4 and leaving about November 6. We traveled in Henry Devlin Thomas's coupe, he seeking insects (aquatic Hemiptera), I amphibians and reptiles as usual. It was an inefficient trip, herpetologically speaking, because herps were incidental to insects. Our schedule was dictated mostly by

Thomas' needs. A letter to a friend furnished the outline of the following account.

July 4 was not a good day to cross the border, but that was the way it worked out. Hordes of others chose that holiday for a lark, and our serious intent was overwhelmed. Spotting my rifle, the inspectors seemed to visualize armed rebellion, and when I told truthfully that I had 2,000 rounds of ammunition with me (all dust shot, of course) they threw up their hands in horror. I gave up arguing that the ammunition could not hurt anything larger than a lizard and went to sleep on the front porch of the immigration office, not having slept except casually for two days and nights. In the meantime, loquacious Thomas out-talked a general of a permission for the rifle and ammunition. The little gun was named "Springfield" — a Stevens model but the officials seemed to think it was an army rifle, based on the name. Strangely, Thomas' .38 revolver caused very little comment. With the *permisos* in our pockets, we happily began to repack our luggage, when another official wandering by spotted the guns and immediately started the hassle all over again. While Thomas engaged his attention another helpful fellow and I hid the artillery in the bottom of the car where it would be out of sight.

Our tourist permit was issued to November 20, and of course that was the date requested for the car, but only weeks later did we notice that the latter was issued for only three months, to September 4.

Leaving Laredo, Thomas was bored with the monotonous desert and, as he often did, leaned heavily on the accelerator. As the speedometer reached ninety-two (mph, not kph), I reasoned successfully that he should take a break while I drove. We spent the night in the car on a side road at Cuesta de las Garrapatas [Hill of the Ticks], which was well named as we inadvertently accumulated many of them in our brief forays there.

Taylor had preceded us on the same highway, and had told us beforehand to look for letters from him in General Delivery in good-sized towns. The first one where we expected a message was Ciudad Victoria, but unfortunately we hit it late on a Saturday, when the post office was closed, as it would be of course on Sunday. We therefore stalled a bit, collecting south of town, and attempting without success because of mud to reach the Miller hacienda. The two-night delay at Don Pepe's Hotel was worth it, however, for we had two letters from Ed. One told us to watch out for robbers, because he had been robbed while asleep (naturally — no one would have dared to try it when he was awake), the other complained that we were late so he went on. So we drove on. When night fell we were high in the mountains, with no place to stay or camp. Thomas had been shirtless during much of the day and had a severe sunburn that made him extremely uncomfortable and eager to get to where he could lie down. Unfortunately we drew a foggy night, and travel was very hazardous. There were very few cars, but the road itself became virtually invisible, its location indicated solely by white-painted stones placed at intervals on the very edge of the road. At times when the fog became especially dense I could not even see the markers; we were moving in a milky sea with nothing visible. It was a very harrowing experience, especially as Thomas was in a foul

mood that goaded him to excessive speeds, tires screeching and the car careening dangerously around ceaseless curves. It was a mystery to me how Thomas could see to drive at all, yet he was traveling about as fast as the car could go on such a winding road. It was a tremendous relief to me, as well as to Thomas (although for different reasons) when we reached a town with a motel where we spent the rest of the night.

Having reached the plateau, the next day posed no problems of weather or visibility. We encountered Taylor about forty miles north of Mexico City. He was, as usual, driving slowly, drifting from one side of the road to the other as he examined the nearby terrain for likely collecting sites. He had made a marvelous collection in the month that he had been on the road, mostly in the mountains back of us, where he had found remarkable salamanders, frogs, lizards and snakes.

In a rare concession to sightseeing, Taylor agreed to go with us to visit the pyramids of San Juan Teotihuacán, which none of us had seen before. Their impressive steepness, high steps and execution platforms were most memorable. We were so late that we spent the night there, Taylor sleeping in his car, where a drunk tried to enter before being thwarted by Ed's loud warnings. It was a restless night for Thomas and me, however, because Thomas' sunburn was still painful, and dogs barked and howled all night while stragglers wandered nearby.

At my request, Taylor permitted Thomas and me to accompany him on a trip to Acapulco. We had spent only one day in the mountains south of Mexico City when Thomas became feverish and ill. I took him to a hotel in Cuernavaca where he stayed several days to recuperate, while Taylor and I collected in the mountains. The rainy season was in full swing, however, keeping us soaked most of the time. I found it impossible to sleep outside because the tarp leaked so badly, so I curled up in the seat of Thomas' coupe and slept rather fitfully there.

When Thomas recovered, we all continued on southward from Cuernavaca, but the rains persisted unabated. It was more than Thomas was prepared to endure, so he refused to go any farther. Of necessity I returned to Mexico City with him, while Taylor continued on to Acapulco.

We stored the car in a garage in Mexico City, and took the train to Uruapan. We engaged horses to take us to Hacienda El Sabino, where I had collected the summer before. The horses were to arrive any minute, but we had time to sleep a couple of nights and collect all of one day before they arrived. El Sabino is a most beautiful place, high on the side of the plateau, with tremendous vistas of the distant lowlands. Not a square yard of land in its natural state is level—it is all up and down. There are three waterfalls, each about 150 feet high, within three miles of the house, and numerous deep canyons.

One day a servant offered to take us hiking to mesa about seven miles away, where supposedly there were a lot of Tarascan Indian village remains. We left at about 8:30 in the morning, crossed one big canyon about 600 feet deep, then found a trail that led across another equally deep canyon, and up the side of a mesa higher than the ranch houses, although several miles on down the side of the plateau. Then the guide lost the trail, and we wandered up and down over two irrelevant *bar-*

rancas [canyons] before we struck the trail again. We didn't get home until near dark, walking virtually all of the time.

It was customary to eat breakfast at about seven or eight o'clock, then dinner at about four or five, and a light supper of bread and tea at about ten o'clock. We fairly bloated ourselves twice a day, but in between times went about with long faces and growling bellies.

We met Taylor again in Mexico City, and stayed with him there a few hours. He left immediately for Veracruz, while Hank and I stuck around a few days longer, packing our equipment in preparation for a train trip to Veracruz. Taylor's rattletrap was still hanging together and miraculously even got him home.

From Veracruz we took a boat to Progreso, Yucatán, and it was a memorable trip. We ran into a heavy storm one night, and the ship did not take it very well, being well overloaded, even the deck jammed with cargo. Waves breaking over the bow piled water up rather badly, some washing into the cabins. The ship rolled and rocked, pitched and tossed and fairly jumped up and down. The rocking was the most uncomfortable, tilting far over on one side, hanging there, then jumping up, righting itself, falling down and tilting over on the other side. Waves sometimes broke clear over the cabin. We were surprised that such a little boat could take so much of a beating. I slept through most of the storm, but occasional big splashes, or the cases on deck banging against the cabin wall would momentarily awaken me. Thomas averred that no one could sleep through the storm, for he had to brace himself all the time to keep from being thrown out of his bunk, despite being in a lower one. Those in upper bunks must have had a still harder time. The cabin smelled terrible, because all but two of the nine passengers were seasick.

We collected for several days around Progreso, and rented a car for the half-hour trip to Mérida. Bus and train service were also available, but the train tracks were narrow-gauge, the engines extremely old, of a wood-burning type with a funnel-shaped smoke stack, and travel rather slowly.

We were vastly impressed with cleanliness of the areas we visited, and with the hospitality of local residents. The people were all Mayan, proud of it, and resented comparisons with "Mexicans." Mérida was quite beautiful.

To our surprise and discomfiture, all the hotels in Progreso appeared to be houses of ill-fame. We spent three nights in one of them, quite undisturbed. By the time we left the girls had taken us under their wings as innocent little boys who did not know what it was all about. They would watch us prepare specimens, and if a man was with one of them he would always be introduced as her husband, the woman seemingly often being blissfully unaware that she had introduced us to several other husbands.

Buses ran every day from Mérida to Chichén Itzá, some three or four hours away. A small hotel and restaurant were available, where we stayed, as well as a huge, superbly outfitted and expensive tourist hotel. Our hotel had four rooms, was clean and cheap, run by very accommodating owners.

Meals were passable. Everyone sleeps in hammocks there, although beds are of course at hand if desired. Hammocks are much cooler, and we had mosquito nets modified to serve with hammocks.

Along the coast we found the vegetation to be very low and sparse, largely century plants, cacti and shriveled shrubs. Bushwhacking nevertheless had to be rather cautious because of the abundance of spines everywhere. Inland the vegetation became denser and higher, considerably over one's head by the time Mérida was reached. Inland from there to Chichén Itzá the trend continued, culminating in a tall rainforest. There walking was almost impossible except along trails and in cleared areas.

Thomas and I collected for several days in and around Chichén Itzá, leaving only when we discovered that it is illegal to walk around the ruins with a lantern at night, without a permit, which would take a month to obtain. I had been getting good collecting at night during our stay there, but unwittingly quite illegally. Collecting during the day was no longer worth more time, so we returned to Mérida, and took the train to Campeche. We found the town too large to collect out from by walking, so we left the next day for Ciudad del Carmen—Hank flying, I traveling by boat overnight with all of our luggage. Dinner on the boat consisted of squid arms, which I regarded as just about as unpalatable as cartilage.

We collected for a few days on the island of Carmen, and then fell in with an American who owned a ranch, Hacienda de Balchacaj, across the bay near the mouth of the Río Mamantel, down which every day we could see huge crocodiles floating to the bay. We rented a small boat to deliver us there, and for a few days collected together out from the ranch houses. It was very difficult, however, because there was nothing but mud and water for leagues in all directions. One could walk no farther than twenty-five feet from the slight elevation on which the buildings were placed before starting to wade. It was so discouraging that Thomas shortly left, and we promised to meet in Mexico City.

Fed up with slopping and flopping around in water and mud near the ranch houses, Martin and I took a boat up the Río Chumpán to a village called Tres Brazos. We stayed there a couple of days, but really the collecting was not much better than at Balchacaj. There was a big lagoon back of the houses about 300 feet away, about three meters deep in the middle, and filled with huge water plants. The larger the plants, the farther out they were, and the bigger the plants the better a certain kind of frog (ultimately found to be a new species) liked it. When I first heard the frog call I knew it was something I hadn't taken before, but the lagoon was a home for crocodiles. They get quite large there—the skull of a fourteen-foot specimen was given to me and its lower jaw measured three feet. I screwed up enough courage to wade out there a couple of nights, but could get only two of the frogs. It just seemed too hazardous to be wading in water chest high over mud knee deep with big crocodiles all around to risk it any further.

Back at Balchacaj, Martin took me by boat up the Río

Mamantel to Pital, sixteen leagues upstream. From there we took horses three leagues into the interior to a ranch, Encarnación, with two houses, that Martin owned. The trail was mostly mud, in places so deep that the horses sank to their bellies and I had to get off so they could extricate themselves. Martin returned at once to Balchacaj, and I remained for several days with the small family at Encarnación.

It was one of my most memorable interludes ever in Mexico. It was distantly isolated, with no other habitations within my range of activity. The forest was therefore largely primeval, untouched by man. A spring-fed stream ran near the houses, providing us with water for all purposes. The area was slightly hilly, with quite a few limestone ridges although most of them were so well hidden by dense vegetation that they were difficult to find and explore. Rotten logs were on all sides, in various stages of decomposition. In some areas, where the trees were especially large, the ground was virtually bare except for dead leaves and humus. In other parts, where more sun reached the ground, the vegetation was so dense that passage was impossible except by laborious chopping with a machete—scarcely worthwhile. Birds of many species were abundant, and howler monkeys were fairly common.

One of my treasured memories is of the tremendous voice the howler monkeys serenaded us with. They would call to each other hour after hour, easily heard for several miles. There was a beckoning, mournful appeal to the calls, exerting a soul-rendering pull as one listened, especially on a lonely night.

I always carried a machete with me as I foraged out in all directions from the dwellings. It was invaluable for clearing partially blocked trails, for creating trails that I could walk at night with my lantern, and for moral support. I carried a small single-shot .22 caliber rifle also, using only shot shells for lizards that were too wary to catch by hand.

It was a surprise to me how thoroughly prickly and thorny the vegetation was—it seemed as vigorously self-protective as desert vegetation. Trees, vines and bushes—even the palms—were simply covered with spines, on all parts. Slender tendrils of vines dangling over the trails had recurved hooks that tenaciously grabbed anything touching them. Repeatedly I had to stop as they grabbed my hair, else they would pull it out by the roots. I had to cut the vines, and then by careful maneuvering could extract the remaining pieces. In addition some bushes harbored armies of ants that vigorously defended the plants, as they stretched their legs and antennae toward any approaching object, daring anything to touch their refuge. They have a vicious bite and also sting. I was warned that a few stings would produce a fever.

Army ants of at least two kinds—large and small black ones—were common. A large group entered the room one evening where I stayed, and cleaned out all the cockroaches and other insects, but did not climb my cot.

It was something of a shock to disturb a colony of stingless bees, for when they swarmed down on my head I thought I was being attacked by stinging bees, and not until they burrowed down into my hair and still did not sting did I realize

that I was in no danger. It was a great relief, for there were hundreds trying to defend their hive.

Many kinds of mammals also occurred in the area—pecaries, deer, fox, bobcats, opossums and, somewhat to my concern, jaguars and pumas. The latter two reach a total length of ten to twelve feet, and my host was full of tales about their exploits, which was somewhat disturbing to my peace of mind when walking trails far from home, both night and day. Pumas were said to be rare, but jaguars common. They killed hogs frequently around ranch houses, and had killed several men on the road to Pital. Martin found a hog, killed by a jaguar, near the ranch houses, and its only wound was a completely crushed head inflicted by one blow from the jaguar's paw. Their leaping abilities are awesome; they could attack before the victim was aware of their presence. Their formidable strength was illustrated by the experience of a rancher who drove his team of oxen, hitched to a cart, along the trail to Pital, where he cut wood for most of the morning. Rather than drive them back at noon, he tied the oxen at one side of the trail and walked home for lunch. When he returned, the oxen and cart were gone. A big trail led off to one side, and following it he found that a jaguar had killed one of the oxen, and pulled it, along with the cart and against the struggles of the other ox, several hundred feet through the forest, breaking down small trees and bushes on the way. It had abandoned the mess with one wheel of the cart caught around a big tree.

Despite the considerable alarm engendered by such tales, I continued with some trepidation collecting alone along the trails radiating out from the ranch houses. At night I would use a Coleman lantern, but unfortunately I had no white gasoline, and as a result the generator gradually accumulated carbon so that after an hour or so I could scarcely see. I would then return to the ranch, dismantle the lantern, clean the carbon from the generator, and start out again. Snakes were my occasional reward, mostly slender, small (two–three feet) “night snakes” of the genus *Leptodeira*. One evening as the lantern had become quite dim and I was about to go back to clean it, another slender snake scurried across the trail and I

grabbed it quickly by the middle of the body as was my custom with the *Leptodeira*, which although rear-fanged seldom attempted to bite. While holding the wriggling snake loosely in one hand I put the lantern down on the ground and stooped low with the snake now supported with both hands, in order to get a good look at the snake inasmuch as I had been getting several species of *Leptodeira* there. Much to my complete astonishment, the snake turned out not to be a *Leptodeira* at all, but a young fer de lance, *Bothrops asper*, a deadly venomous snake that attains a size of six feet or so. I dropped the snake like a hot potato, and with shaking hands caught it as one should catch such a dangerous animal, holding down the head with my boot while grasping the body just behind the head so it could not bite. Why the snake did not bite while I had been handling it so casually I will never know. No doubt the fact that I was gentle with it helped, but even so that species is not one to tolerate liberties. I was exceptionally lucky, for I had no antivenin or effective first aid, and medical attention would have been days away.

Eventually my stay came to an end, and I returned on horseback to Pital, and by *cayuca* (a native canoe) to a ranch, Panlao, at the mouth of the river, where I stayed with the family there until they could take me back to Balchacaj.

Much to my surprise, a message awaited me from Thomas, to the effect that he was sick in Mexico City and I should come at once. I had expected to return by boat, but the urgency of the message indicated that I would have to fly back. Martin took me by boat to Ciudad del Carmen, where I caught a plane to Veracruz, and another from there to Mexico City, where I found Thomas completely recovered from whatever had ailed him. I was considerably annoyed to have been yanked from fruitful collecting in Campeche, but Thomas was tired and wanted to return home. Inasmuch as I was traveling with him, I had no choice, and we drove shortly thereafter back to the University of Kansas, where we were both still graduate students.

To be continued

Bull. Chicago Herp. Soc. 36(3):57-58, 2001

**Book Review: *Salamanders of the United States and Canada* by James W. Petranka
1998. Smithsonian Institution Press, Washington and London. xvi + 587 pp.
Hardbound (ISBN 1-56098-828-2) \$60**

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As the first serious nationwide treatment of salamanders since Sherman Bishop's *Handbook of Salamanders* in 1943, this book fills an important void. Petranka is obviously well aware of this fact, and mentions it in the initial paragraph of his preface. If his goal was to expand and update the information available in that earlier reference, he has succeeded.

Each of the 127 species accounts is detailed, including information on identification, systematics and geographic variation, distribution and adult habitat, breeding and courtship, reproductive strategy, aquatic ecology, terrestrial ecology, predators and defense, community ecology, and conservation. Each account also includes a range map and several

black and white photos, typically including larval, juvenile and adult individuals, eggs, and sometimes representative habitat. In addition color photographs of most species are included in plates in the center of the book.

The species accounts provide a great deal of information, including an extensive literature review. All herpetologists have much more experience with some taxa or in certain geographic regions, but here the heavy reliance on citing publications of others minimizes any potential bias or imbalance in information presented. Species are grouped by family and subfamily, and are listed alphabetically at all levels. As a result anyone with a solid grasp of taxonomy can locate a particular species account quickly.

Basic background information is included in a well written introduction, with the added attraction of unusually well done line drawings by D. A. Thomas. Keys to adult and larval forms are included. I have not tested these, but from a quick review they appear to be accurate and practical.

The few drawbacks of the book involve, in my view, one-sided presentations of personal opinion. This is most evident in the preface, which is essentially an argument in favor of the biological species concept and an attack on alternative taxonomic systems, particularly the evolutionary species concept. While Petranka expends a great deal of effort and verbiage to back up his preferred system, descriptions of alternative systems are somewhat superficial. This has practical consequences throughout the book, because Petranka's nomenclature for some groups differs considerably from that used in most current field guides. For example, he accepts the recent division of *Dicamptodon* and *Rhyacotriton* into multiple species within each genus (Good, 1989; Good and Wake, 1992), but does not accept changes to the *Eurycea bislineata* or *Plethodon glutinosus* complexes (Jacobs, 1987; Highton et al., 1989). The result is likely to be confusion for those new to the study of salamanders, or those looking for a basic reference and not interested in the academic warfare swirling around disagreements over taxonomy. While moving in the direction of resolving salamander taxonomy is desirable, this is probably not the best

venue for strident advocacy. On the plus side, Petranka does neatly resolve the complexity of polyploid *Ambystoma* by including all such forms in one separate account.

I also found the discussions of habitat to be simplistic, a situation unfortunately not unique to this book (see Mierzwa, 1998, for a more detailed discussion). Detailed quantitative habitat assessments have been published for many salamanders, especially for Pacific Northwest forms and for many rare or endangered species throughout the country, but for some reason most professional herpetologists persist in lumping communities into broad categories such as "coastal forest." There is also typically a lack of understanding of the temporal dynamics of native ecosystems, which have undergone profound changes in structural characteristics as a result of hydrological change, fire suppression, and the introduction of exotic species. I wonder if these accounts were intentionally oversimplified, because the author does have relevant habitat experience. In any case the habitat sections are often the shortest parts of species accounts, and usually I wanted more information than was presented.

Petranka's inclusion of sections on conservation biology in the introduction and in each species account at least is a crucially important recognition that such things matter. Unfortunately, reading these conservation biology accounts is depressing. They are a litany of population loss or decline, with no apparent recognition that many successful recovery efforts are already underway. The discussion of logging practices also fails to acknowledge that differences of opinion exist on this topic and that there may be geographic variation in both effects and practical solutions.

On balance the strengths of this book considerably outweigh the few negatives. Perhaps the greatest advantage of such a publication is the compilation of so much material all within one reference; writing it must have been a massive task. It will be an invaluable starting point for anyone working with a salamander species they are not already thoroughly familiar with. This book belongs on the shelf alongside such classics as Bishop (1941, 1943) and Dunn (1926).

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Herps in Hollywood: *Python*

by John Kostka

Python is a film that doesn't seem to work well on any level. It doesn't function well as a thriller, for the simple reason that it is not thrilling. It tries not to take itself too seriously, but much of its humor falls flat. It seems to succeed only at being campy and exploitative. If that's what you're looking for, you will enjoy it. If not, you still may have some fun, though not as much.

The film opens with a rather poorly rendered CGI (Computer Generated Image) of a plane flying through stormy skies. Inside, the pilot is nervous about the cargo they are carrying. He asks that the other man on the plane go check it out. "It's top secret," he says, "but you have my permission." This is the first of many unintentionally amusing moments in the film, and rest assured that when I say "many," I mean *many*.

The man sent to investigate the contents of the giant crate pries it open with a crowbar, and is attacked, the snake thrashing so violently that it actually breaks through the side of the plane(!?) Soon, the plane has plummeted to the desert below, the fate of the vicious cargo unknown.

After this comes a staggeringly gratuitous lesbian love sequence (I told you it was exploitative) taking place in a tent. The women's moment of passion, however, is unfortunately intruded upon by the pet python of one of the girls (*not* vicious, mind you). Angry, the other woman storms out to relieve herself, and, surprise of surprises, does not return (the film really catches you off guard with its ingenious plot devices). Soon, the other girl is killed off, leading into the not too badly composed (the editing is rather tight and well done in some instances) opening credits.

After this, a veritable circus of stock characters is introduced, including the young, cute hero, his young, cute friend (actually a purple-haired body-pierced realtor, so maybe I should let *you* decide whether he's cute), and their young, cute girlfriends. Their peaceful day at the local swimming hole is interrupted by the notification via the town deputy (who is young and cute as well, and bears hostility towards the film's hero) that the acid-melted corpses of the two girls we met before the opening credits have been discovered. In the blink of an eye, our hero finds himself accused of the murders.

Meanwhile, a herpetologist, the one responsible for the snake, works on hatching a plan to get it back, along with, I think, the military (I'm still not quite sure exactly who these people were or how they got involved). He explains that the snake is a hybrid of several species (leading the perplexed viewer to wonder why the film was titled *Python*) found in the jungles of Asia. This is one pleasing aspect of the film, it does not bother to give us a tired old explanation about genetic research or government experiments, it leaves the beast's origin to the imagination. He elucidates (the running joke being that he uses "big words" that he constantly must explain to the military officials) that the snake is able to spray stomach acid that it stores in glands near the mouth(!?) and travel at speeds of up to fifty miles per hour. He also says the creature is "129 feet long," leading the viewer to wonder how it fit into

such a small crate at the film's beginning.

To make a long story short, the snake slaughters a great many people (including all of the military personnel) and relentlessly attacks the two young couples (including one of the girls in a rather *Psycho*-esque shower scene). This eventually leads to the big finale, which, as we see in so many other films, absolutely *must* include an exploding building.

To its credit, *Python* does try to please as many people as possible. Its frequent sexual situations go for the groins of adolescents, gratuitously displaying flesh in the process. It also tries to add some *Lake Placid*-style humor, though it is not quite as well (or scathingly) written. To its credit, however, it did have a few intentional chuckles.

Finally, it tries to woo us with several (rather minor) guest stars, including: Jenny McCarthy as a prospective real-estate client who seems to be vying for the title of most lustful woman alive; Casper Van Dien as the chief snake-hunter (his role in *Starship Troopers*, a film which sent CHS bus riders on the 1998 St. Louis Zoo trip into the extremes of agony, has by now most surely been forgotten); and Robert Englund, probably more familiar in makeup as Freddy Krueger from the *Nightmare on Elm Street* series, for once, playing a rather restrained role.

The film is further dragged down by, primarily, the notable absence of the titular menace. Until the final half-hour (of a movie much too long at 100 minutes), we barely get to see any of the creature at all. Most of our time is spent delving into the characters' increasingly irritating personal lives and hatreds of each other, making the film seem more like another hackneyed "young-adult" drama series than a killer reptile movie. The hero being falsely accused of murder wears thin rather quickly, and the constant bickering between the characters is more grating than dramatic. Also adding to the movie's problems is the presence of a rather obtrusive hard rock score, as well as the obviously insubstantial effects budget, which does not allow for a very realistic (or python-like) snake.

Of course, the film is not all bad. There are some unintentionally amusing events that will almost guarantee a laugh. Most notably: a woman somehow decapitated by the snake's tail; the military firing upon a conveniently shed snakeskin; the hero somehow managing to fend off the gigantic serpent with his bare hands; and, finally, the fact that while the snake kills person after person, it never even bothers to eat them (if the protagonists had just waited, maybe it would have died of starvation!) The "fanged python," featured on the video box, is also good for a chuckle, in my opinion.

Of course, there's more than this in *Python*, but, if someone reading this does choose to view it, I don't want to ruin all the fun surprises. These are just a few things to look for.

I think that for a herpetological enthusiast, *Python* should be worth viewing if you're in the mood. It does, I believe, have enough in it to provide a night's worth of campy entertainment, and the R-rated aspect does allow for a bit more

“midnight movie”-ish fun (like the snake tail decapitation) than in similar, but PG-13, entries like *Anaconda*, *King Cobra* and *Komodo*. I’d be willing to wager that herp enthusiasts will get a kick out of it, though don’t expect any high drama.

20th Century Fox Home Entertainment, 2000, 100 min.

MPAA rating: R for: Strong violence/gore, language, sexual content and nudity.

COMING SOON

As stated in previous articles, *Crocodile II: Death Roll* is already in production, slated to be filmed in India. The release date of *Blood Surfer* (about saltwater crocodiles down

under) is unsure at this time, but from what I hear the film has been shot. Sam Neill will star in *Jurassic Park III*, the promotional posters of which are already beginning to appear in cinema lobbies (at least in the theaters I go to). You can be sure this won’t fall through. *Reptilicus 2* (the first concerned a reptilian monster generated from a dinosaur limb — who knows what this will have in store!) is reportedly being planned, almost forty years after the release of the original, though details are sketchy. On the serpentine front, *Komodo* and *Anaconda* scriptwriter Hans Bauer is planning another script entitled *Snake*, concerning a giant python escaped from a carnival sideshow terrorizing a family trapped in their rural Iowa farmhouse. He’s thinking of trying one more giant reptile script after that, but so far nothing has been written.

Bull. Chicago Herp. Soc. 36(3):60-64, 2001

HerPET-POURRI

by Ellin Beltz

Get your calculator

Illinois has acquired 16 acres as buffer land for Wolf Road Prairie in suburban Westchester to help keep intact one of the best examples of original prairie in the Midwest. . . . The state paid \$4.5 million for the property using dollars set aside to preserve open space. [*Chicago Tribune*, November 9, 2000, from Teri Radke]

Coffee-holics, take note!

“Hawaii has been overrun with tree frogs that chirp as loud as lawnmowers, and the situation has become so dire that experts warn it could have serious effects on the state economy. . . . The frogs arrived in shipments of agricultural goods, . . . first noticed in the mid-1980s in rural Kurtistown on the Big Island, but have since spread to parts of Oahu, Maui and Kauai. In some areas, there are now more than 8,000 frogs per acre. . . . The state is currently experimenting with a pure caffeine spray that should send the frogs into cardiac arrest. It is not believed to be harmful to humans, native plants and wildlife, but the effects are still being studied. [Toronto, Ontario, *National Post*, December 30, 2000, from Wes von Papineau]

How many will be left?

Ghana’s earnings from exporting pythons slid more than 40 percent in 2000 as rising exports from neighboring states flooded the world market, forestry officials said. . . . ‘Due to exports in larger quantities by Togo and Benin, causing price fluctuation from five to between two and three dollars per python, trading did not favor Ghanaian wildlife exporters,’ . . . [said the] senior wildlife protection officer at Ghana’s Forestry Commission. . . . Around 30,000 pythons, both farmed and caught in the wild, were exported, mainly to the United States and Europe, for a total of \$91,000 — down from over \$160,000 taken the previous year from the sale of 33,000 of the reptiles. ‘They are mostly used as pets and in some instances for scientific purposes. However, the larger ones are sometimes used as delicacies in restaurants,’ [he] said. Python skins are also used for highly priced shoes, bags and belts. [Reuters, January 17, 2001, from Wes von Papineau]

Post Turtles

While suturing a laceration on the hand of a 90-year-old man (he got his hand caught in a gate while working his cattle) a doctor and the old man were discussing Bush’s health care reform ideas. The old man said “Well, ya know, old Bush is a post turtle”. So, not knowing what he meant the doctor asked him what a “post turtle” was. And he said, “When you’re driving down a country road, and you come across a fence post with a turtle balanced on top, that’s a post turtle. You know he didn’t get there by himself, he doesn’t belong there, he can’t get anything done while he’s up there, and you just want to help the poor thing down.” [Internet — from J. N. Stuart]

Maplethorpe at 5?

This is supposed to be a true story. “A kindergarten teacher had a pupil tell her he had found a frog. She inquired as to whether it was alive or dead. ‘Dead,’ she was informed. ‘How do you know?’ she asked. ‘Because I pissed in his ear,’ said the child innocently. ‘You did WHAT?’ squealed the teacher in surprise. ‘You know,’ explained the boy, ‘I leaned over and went “Pssst.” He didn’t move.’ [Internet — from J. N. Stuart]

Webthings

- Visit the “largest herpetological directory in the world” at < <http://www.naherpetology.org/>> courtesy of the Center for North American Herpetology and Travis Taggart (webbist extraordinaire). [February 22, 2001, from Joe Collins]
- Visit < <http://www.herpdigest.org/>> to subscribe to *HerpDigest*, the free weekly electronic newsletter on reptile and amphibian conservation and science. Moderated by Allen Salzberg < asalzberg@nyc.rr.com> it often has job listings and other up-to-the-minute tidbits about herps in daily life.

Define “Fish”

“According to a proposed federal policy that defines when federal natural resource agencies may mandate fish passage

measures at hydropower projects, a fishway includes passage of all forms of freshwater, estuarine, and marine animal life other than mammals and birds. The policy was published in the Federal Register at the close of the Clinton Administration, and is of concern to the National Hydropower Association which says that policy could potentially include frogs, snails, snakes, sponges, aquatic insects and anything else that lives in the water. The association is worried that “the proposal would give government agents broad new latitude in determining the operations, future plans, and ultimately the economic viability of hydroelectric projects, not only by expanding the definition of a fish, but also the definition of a ‘fishway’ beyond the legal meaning established in the Energy Policy Act of 1992.” A press release by the association (2/20/01) says that the trade group will seek the immediate rescission of the policy, claiming that the potential impact on generation capacity and the cost of electricity could be staggering.” [*River News*, February 23, 2001, from J. N. Stuart and Karen Furnweger]

Define “Turtle”

“What is meant by a ‘land turtle?’ Or more specifically, what would have been the original intent of saying ‘land turtles and tortoises’ in the original [NY] law? Babcock (1905) referred to box, wood and Blanding’s as tortoises. DeKay (1842) referred to mud, musk, spotted, painted, Muhlenberg’s and geographic as tortoises. Could it have been that in the early 1900s all turtles and tortoises, except the sea turtles and diamondback terrapin, were considered land turtles? . . . If you know of any references that would support a particular definition of “land turtle” please let me know. Thanks. Alvin R. Breisch, Amphibian and Reptile Specialist, New York State Department of Environmental Conservation, Wildlife Resources Center, Endangered Species Unit, 108 Game farm Road, Delmar, NY 12054. Fax: (518) 478-3045. E-mail: < arbreisc@gw.dec.state.ny.us> and website < <http://www.dec.state.ny.us/website/dfwmr/wildlife/herp/index.html>>

Frog Relocation Costs Consultant

“An Emeryville environmental consultant has been charged in federal court with illegally relocating 64 endangered California red-legged frogs and 500 tadpoles from a Concord construction site. [The 46-year-old man] is accused of four counts of violating the federal Endangered Species Act [ESA] for moving the frogs in May and July 1999 at the . . . construction site in Concord. . . . [His attorney] said his client intends to plead guilty to two counts . . . [while his firm] will enter guilty pleas on the two other counts. [The attorney added,] ‘We regret that it occurred. This was as much for the benefit of the frogs as much as anything else. It wasn’t done to intentionally harm the frogs.’ ”To put this in context, the man and employees moved some frogs from a waterway and a pond that was to be filled in and placed them in other parts of the same site which would not be harmed. However, they didn’t file the proper paperwork with the U.S. Fish and Wildlife Service [USFWS] or the California Department of Fish and Game. Red-legged frogs were once common throughout the state, but were reduced by draining, agriculture, chemicals, active frog hunting and other causes and are now listed as a threatened species in 1996. [*San Francisco Chronicle*, November 8, 2000] The consultant was sentenced to pay a \$10,000 fine, three years

probation and serve 200 hours for the relocation of about 60 frogs on his project. His business will pay a \$65,000 fine. [*Contra Costa Times*, February 23, 2001] Some local writers had a field day with this topic including Debra J. Saunders who wrote: “If the feds had their way, [the] environmental consultant . . . would be in jail right now. One of his cell brethren eventually would ask, ‘What are you in for?’ ‘Moving frogs,’ he could say. . . . Yes, the Ribbit Police wanted [him] to pay a stiffer punishment than what is meted to most first-time drunken drivers, who endanger human lives. . . . Of course, the feds have to enforce even dumb laws—but they don’t need to overenforce laws. [The man’s] legal fees, fines and community service are punishment aplenty. Especially when court documents indicate that Kermit and his buddies are living large in the pond. After all, if frogs croak free, why should [the man] sit in stir? Is this what Mark Twain would have wanted?” [*San Francisco Chronicle*, February 25, 2001, all from Christine Ross and K. S. Mierzwa]

- Meanwhile “A new government report finds that ‘designating more than 5 million acres in California as federal habitat for the red-legged frog’ will have a ‘slight’ economic impact and won’t significantly change development projects outside of Alameda and Contra Costa Counties. . . . Most of the added costs of the critical habitat designation, which stretches ‘across 31 California counties,’ would be for ‘extra consulting costs borne by developers.’ Environmentalists, however, say that the study ‘underestimates the benefits’ of habitat protection such as improved ecosystem health, flood control and increased real estate values.” [*GreenLines* #1288, January 2, 2001]

Science, oh science!

“Seeking roadkilled or frozen preserved massasauga samples from known localities. Contact: Andrew T. Holycross, Department of Biology, Arizona State University, Tempe, AZ 85287-1501. E-mail: < holycow@asu.edu> fax: (480) 965-2519 or (480) 965-0362.

Surprise! Ag Chemicals Kill Frogs

Widely quoted (and misquoted) in the popular press, here is the whole text of a landmark announcement: “USGS Research Finds that Contaminants May Play an Important Role in California Amphibian Declines. Scientists have confirmed that agricultural contaminants may be an important factor in amphibian declines in California. According to an article recently accepted by the journal *Environmental Toxicology and Chemistry*, a study by scientists of the U.S. Geological Survey and U.S. Department of Agriculture indicates that organophosphorus pesticides from agricultural areas, which are transported to the Sierra Nevada on prevailing summer winds, may be affecting populations of amphibians that breed in mountain ponds and streams.

Dramatic population declines in red-legged frogs, foothills yellow-legged frogs, mountain yellow-legged frogs and Yosemite toads have occurred in California over the last 10–15 years, but no single cause for these declines has been positively identified. Scientists and managers have been especially concerned because many of these declines occurred in some of the state’s most seemingly pristine areas. Declines have been

particularly drastic in the Sierra Nevada, which lies east of the intensely agricultural San Joaquin Valley. The red-legged frog is listed as threatened under the U.S. Endangered Species Act, and the mountain yellow-legged frog and Yosemite toad have been proposed for listing.

‘While crucial to the agriculture industry, pesticides by their very nature can result in serious harm to wildlife both by directly killing animals and through more subtle effects on reproduction, development and behavior,’ said Dr. Donald Sparling, a research biologist and contaminants specialist at the USGS Patuxent Wildlife Research Center in Maryland. ‘Unfortunately, now there appears to be a close correlation between declining populations of amphibians in the Sierra Nevada and exposure to agricultural pesticides.’

The scientists found proof that pesticides are being absorbed by frogs in both aquatic and terrestrial systems and are suppressing an enzyme called cholinesterase, which is essential for the proper functioning of the nervous system. Modern-day pesticides function by binding with this enzyme in animals and disrupting nervous system activity, usually causing death by respiratory failure. Decreased cholinesterase activity can indicate exposure to certain commonly used pesticides and can be harmful to animals.

The scientists collected 170 tadpole and 117 adult Pacific treefrogs, a species that still is fairly abundant in the Sierra Nevada, from a total of 23 sites in six locations including coastal, foothill, Lake Tahoe Basin, Yosemite and Sequoia National Parks; adult frogs were also collected from Lassen National Park. They found that cholinesterase activity levels in tadpoles were significantly lower in the mountains east of the San Joaquin Valley compared with similar sites farther north and east of the Sacramento Valley where agricultural activity is less intense. Moreover, cholinesterase activity became decreasingly lower in tadpoles from both northern and southern sample sites as the sites moved in a gradient from the coast to the higher elevations. Thus, tadpole populations in the mountains had lower cholinesterase values than those along the coast. Similar but less significant trends were seen in adult frogs.

The researchers also measured concentrations of particular pesticides in the bodies of tadpoles and adults. More than 50 percent of the adult frogs and tadpoles at Yosemite National Park had measurable levels of chlorpyrifos or diazinon, compared to only 9 percent at the coastal reference sites. Frogs at Yosemite National Park also had a higher frequency of detection for chlorpyrifos than those on the coast. Both diazinon and chlorpyrifos degrade very rapidly in organisms, and the detection of either compound indicates recent exposure to the chemicals. Of the pesticides tested in related lab studies, chlorpyrifos and diazinon, commonly used organophosphates, suppressed nervous system activity and, along with endosulfan, a frequently used organochlorine pesticide, proved the most highly toxic to frogs. Diazinon has recently been targeted for a three-year phaseout by the U.S. Environmental Protection Agency.

‘The presence of pesticides and the decrease in cholinesterase activity in Pacific treefrogs suggest that other species, which

are more closely associated with water, could be even more affected,’ said Dr. Gary Fellers, a research biologist and amphibian specialist at the USGS Western Ecological Research Center in California. ‘Mountain yellow-legged frogs, for example, spend two or three years as tadpoles before they metamorphose and then spend considerable time in the water as adults. Melting of pesticide-contaminated snow could provide a pulse of toxic chemicals at a critical time in the life history of these frogs.’” [<http://www.usgs.gov> U.S. Department of the Interior, U.S. Geological Survey press release, December 12, 2000, from Karen Furnweger and Bradford Norman]

Meanwhile from USDA

“Just a reminder as we gear up for post-fire projects, including those projects associated with aerial application of herbicides to control noxious weeds: Management of weeds and insect pests with chemical herbicides and pesticides can have major impacts on amphibian communities. In particular, several features of amphibian biology may enhance their susceptibility to chemical contamination . . . allowing exposure to toxicants in both habitats. Many amphibians have skin with vascularization in the epidermis and little keratinization, allowing easy absorption of many toxicants. In fact, many studies have demonstrated the effects of chemical contamination on amphibians. . . . The effects range from direct mortality to sublethal effects such as depressed disease resistance, inhibition of growth and development, decreased reproductive ability, inhibition of predator avoidance behaviors, and morphological abnormalities.

Currently, there is no requirement for testing the toxicity of herbicides and pesticides on amphibians. . . . Furthermore, there are no water quality criteria established for amphibians. . . . It is often assumed that criteria for mammals, birds, and fish will incorporate the protection needed for amphibians. The few chemicals that have been tested with fish and larval amphibians suggest that tadpoles may be more vulnerable to some toxicants than fish.

The sublethal effects are also important. . . . Organophosphates affect the thermal tolerance of western toad tadpoles. Polychlorinated biphenyls (PCBs) and organochlorines can disrupt corticosterone production and inhibit glucogenesis. . . . Many pesticides result in decreased growth rate and inhibition of a predator response in amphibians. . . .

Many of the newer pesticides and herbicides are designed to decompose soon after application. Although still toxic, presumably this reduces the impact area and thus, the number of exposed individuals. . . .

Citations are available in recent contract report “Management of Montana’s Amphibians—A Review of Risk Factors to Population Viability” (available by request). Linda Ulmer, Regional Aquatic Ecologist, USDA, Forest Service Northern Rockies, P.O. Box 7669, Missoula MT 59807. E-mail: lulmer@fs.fed.us [from Bradford Norman]

Run, Lola, Run I

Melbourne: A snake catcher was called to protect emergency service workers after a man covered in bites was pulled from a

car wreck after a head-on collision on Monday night. The man, in his 50s, remained in a critical condition . . . after bites were found over his neck, stomach and groin. . . . Ambulance paramedics had not noticed the bites when removing the man from the wreckage and transferring him. . . . Witnesses reported seeing the man's car swerving . . . [and] driving on the wrong side of the road before sideswiping one car and colliding head-on with an oncoming vehicle. A 20-year-old woman driving the second car was taken to hospital in critical condition. Police and State Emergency Service officers were at the site clearing the wreckage when the hospital called. [A] snake handler . . . was contacted by police . . . to go through the wreckage, [but he didn't find anything]. A snake expert from Melbourne Zoo . . . said it was more likely the man had been bitten before getting into the car. 'Tiger snakes are territorial. It would be very, very rare for them to climb into a car. If he's been bit a number of times in the neck, groin and stomach it sounds as if he was handling the snake. Those injuries are consistent with him holding it by the tail.' [Australia, *Canberra Times*, February 7, 2001, from Wes von Papineau]

Run, Lola, Run II

"What would you do if a Cape cobra suddenly slithered between your legs while you were driving at 80 km/h? The vehicle, with all its doors locked and windows rolled up, was parked in the shade. An hour later, [the security guard] drove off: 'I looked down and saw something moving on the floor.' A yellowish cobra, with its head and about 10 cm of its body protruding from under his seat, was hissing at him. 'At first, I wanted to jump. Then I thought of how I would have to explain to my boss why I had thrown myself out of a moving vehicle. I thought of shooting the snake, but the chances of shooting myself were high.' [He] eased his foot off the accelerator, careful not to scare the snake. The car slowly rolled to a halt. 'When you are trapped inside a car with a Cape cobra, it's no joke. I opened the door and rolled out.' The snake, which was probably as frightened as Bredenkamp, quickly escaped. 'I saw something yellow crossing over my legs and slithering into the grass nearby.' [South Africa, *Cape Times*, February 8, 2001, from Wes von Papineau]

Pleads guilty to 40 felony charges

"Keng Liang Anson Wong, a well-known international wildlife dealer who spent nearly two years in a Mexican prison fighting extradition to the United States, pleaded guilty today in federal court in San Francisco to 40 felony charges stemming from 1992 and 1998 federal indictments for trafficking in some of the most rare and endangered reptile species on Earth. The charges include money laundering, conspiracy, smuggling, and violations of the Lacey Act, a U.S. wildlife protection law that prohibits trade in animals protected under federal, state, or international law and the making of false statements concerning wildlife shipments. . . . Wong is scheduled to be sentenced in March 2001. . . . A number of the species involved, such as Komodo dragons and plowshare tortoises, already on the brink of extinction, occur only in very limited, geographically isolated habitats. . . . At the time of these transactions, Wong was wanted in the United States under a 1992 indictment charging him with conspiring to smuggle endangered Fiji banded iguanas, Bengal monitor lizards, and Indian soft-shelled turtles

into this country for sale to a reptile dealer in Florida. . . . Other species smuggled by Wong included Grey's monitor lizards, spider tortoises, Burmese star tortoises, Indian star tortoises, Boelen's pythons, Timor pythons, green tree pythons, and Fly River turtles. . . . The undercover federal probe of Wong and his business associates was conducted by special agents from the Services Branch of Special Operations, an enforcement unit specializing in covert investigations of illegal wildlife trade, with assistance from the U.S. Customs Service, the Mexican Attorney Generals Office, Interpol, and the Royal Canadian Mounted Police in Canada. The case was prosecuted by the U.S. Attorney's Office for the Northern District of California and the Wildlife and Marine Resources Section of the Justice Departments Environment and Natural Resources Division. The California-based Wong case was one of several completed as part of Operation Chameleon, a comprehensive multi-year Service investigation of the illegal reptile trade conducted in partnership with the Justice Departments Wildlife and Marine Resources Section and U.S. Attorney's offices in several states. This long-term, concentrated effort to combat reptile trafficking also broke up a major smuggling ring that was funneling Madagascan snakes and tortoises to Germany and then on to markets in the United States and Canada; secured a guilty plea to charges of fraud and theft from the reptile curator of a well-known California zoo; and produced charges against more than 40 people in the United States, Canada, and Germany. [<http://www.fws.gov/>] Fish and Wildlife Service Press Release from Bradford Norman]

Small bits of good news

- "The Nature Conservancy has purchased the 525-acre Parker Ranch in Nevada's Oasis Valley to preserve habitat vital to the Amargosa toad, a minnow and snail." [*GreenLines* #1282, December 21, 2000]
- "'One of the most important sea turtle nesting beaches in the world' was donated to Archie Carr NWR in Florida by the Richard King Mellon Foundation. . . . Last summer, the half-mile of ocean front saw 19,000 threatened loggerhead, 2,800 endangered green, and 13 endangered leatherback sea turtles nest there. The donation also includes some 35 acres of scrub habitat vital to the threatened Florida scrub jay and eastern indigo snake." [*GreenLines* #1284, December 26, 2000]
- "Despite a court settlement that gives the EPA authority over development permits in Texas's Barton Springs watershed, developers and environmentalists both warn that 'more lawsuits loom on the horizon' if things don't go their way. . . . Environmentalists are now closely watching the USFWS, which wanted more stringent regulations to protect the endangered salamander's habitat, to see how negotiations with the EPA on the final permit rules will turn out. . . ." [*GreenLines* #1288, January 2, 2001]

Looking forward to more clippings from the usual suspects and from you! Fold minimally, stuff whole pages from newspapers into large envelopes (be sure the publication, date and your name are on their somewhere) and send to: Ellin Beltz, 1647 N. Clybourn Avenue, Chicago, IL 60614-5507. Letters

Unofficial Minutes of the CHS Board Meeting, February 16, 2001

The meeting was called to order at 7:40 P.M. Board member Emily Forcade was absent.

Officers' Reports

Vice-president: Lori King reported that Jack had forwarded an E-mail about rattlesnake roundups to herself and Mike Dloogatch. The Utila Island Iguana Project is moving ahead. At the March meeting, Ron Humbert and Mike Redmer will give slide presentations on "An Amphibian Potpourri."

Recording Secretary: Emily Forcade was absent; Will Forcade delivered minutes of the January meeting, which were read by Publications Secretary Mike Redmer. Corrections were made and the minutes were accepted.

Treasurer: Greg Brim brought checks for several board members who had requested reimbursement.

Membership Secretary: Mike Dloogatch reported that membership has dropped to 796. Rich Crowley suggested a contest to encourage regular members to recruit new members.

Lengthy discussion regarding increased recruitment options followed. Jack formed a Membership and Recruitment committee to consist of Lori King, Mike Dloogatch, Mike Redmer, Steve Spitzer (Chair, pro tem), and Char Haguewood.

Publications Secretary: Mike Redmer noted that a hit-counter has been installed on the CHS home page, and is receiving about 35 hits/day. An advertisement for the CHS Web Site, featuring a Don Wheeler "Spot Cartoon," has been prepared for insertion into the *Bulletin*. Among other things the advertisement solicits inquiry from potential advertisers. Mike noted that advertising on the web site will probably require us to upgrade our Kingsnake.com service. Mike also noted that a committee to review ad rates and applications will be needed. Jack advised that Mike could form a committee to do this.

Standing Committees

Grants: Mike Dloogatch reported that we have received only one application to date, but that more typically come just before the deadline.

Shows: Jenny Vollman reported that Chicago Wilderness (CW) has invited CHS participation or an unmanned display in CW members night at the Field Museum on April 7-10. Jenny also reported that the Park Forest Environmental Conservation Commission invited CHS participation in their Earth Day 2001 fair. She asked for a volunteer.

Raffle: Gary Kostka reported that Sandi from *Reptiles* magazine indicated that *Reptiles* will donate additional subscriptions.

Library: Jeff Janovitz was not in attendance. Linda Malawy noted that she has been storing a book cart for some time, and she would like to find someone else to take it. Jack asked her

to bring it to the general meeting at which time he will take it.

Adoptions: Rich Crowley reported that the web interactive adoption application form was not working consistently. Mike Redmer said he will ask Chris Lechowicz to look into it. Rich also reported that he has various monitors and ball pythons available for adoption. Rich also did some additional checking with Brookfield Zoo regarding updating the contact information. Several other outlets may also need updated information.

ReptileFest: Darin Croft was absent, but provided Jack with an E-mail update (distributed to the board by Jack). Steve Spitzer noted that CHS insurance protected CHS, and CHS board members, but not individuals attending the 'Fest. Gary Kostka suggested anyone attending and displaying an animal which could bite should also keep on hand a first-aid kit. Ron Humbert reported that 20 exhibitors had signed up. He has also offered free tables to 12 other midwestern herpetological societies. Board members suggested Ron invite several others not on his list. Jack has distributed flyers. Lee Watson also agreed to distribute flyers at his swap meet.

Ad Hoc Committees

CAS: The Chicago Academy of Sciences has not replied to Jack's request for a meeting. Mike Dloogatch will contact CAS to discuss our problems. We have the venue reserved until April, and have scheduled programs there until July. Jack suggested we continue to explore meeting place options.

Awards: At the January 31 meeting Don Wheeler was presented with the CHS Lifetime Service Award, and Char Haguewood received the Presidential Service Award for the year 2000.

Trips: Char has elicited prices for bus service for the May trip to Toledo Zoo. Char will book service from Coach One, Inc., but will require a \$250 deposit. Steve Spitzer moved that \$250 be allocated to the deposit for bus service. The motion passed unanimously.

Salamander Safari: Ron Humbert reports that we have secured the necessary permits from the Forest Preserve District of Cook County. Ron asked that members who keep amphibians consider sharing them for display or photography.

Symposium 2001: Char reported status quo, though several new vendors have registered, and Joan Moore is still working on breeders' rules. The committee reports that additional speakers are being approached.

Old Business

Frog Call Tapes: Mike Redmer reported that progress was inhibited by unavoidable delays, and that Lang Elliot could not make the tapes in time for the field season. However, Lang has agreed to provide Chicago Audubon/Habitat project a CD

with just calls. These will be available in time for Chicago Wilderness frog monitors, and Lang will still make the full-service studio version in time for next year's surveys.

Chicago Wilderness: Mike Redmer has declined serving as a CHS liaison due to a conflict. Char is still interested, and Jack will ask Tom Anton if he is interested in serving as the other.

New Business

Jack got E-mail from Bill Becker regarding the International Herpetological Symposium (IHS) in Detroit (July 13–15). Several board members will attend, and will bring CHS literature in exchange for announcements of IHS at CHS functions.

Rich Crowley reported that Illinois Department of Public health has required all pet shops to display an advisory notice regarding a possible link between reptiles and zoonotic diseases which can be transmitted to humans. Rich suggested we carry and distribute these at ReptileFest and it was agreed on by consensus.

Rich Crowley also mentioned that recent changes in the Indiana State Laws now require permits for possession of "dangerous" and native herps. Hoosier Herp Society is looking

into legal interpretation.

Retreat: Jack discussed the need to schedule another "retreat" to follow up on the suggestions generated at the one held in November. Ron Humbert invited the retreat to be held at his home in Michigan. After some discussion the retreat was scheduled for June 1–2.

Lori King reported that the PR committee has secured air time on the upcoming "Animal Planet Radio."

Round Table

The board expressed kudos to Dan Bavrisha for initiating a new name-tag system at the general meetings, and for so effectively controlling noise. The board also expressed kudos to Rich and Linda for their hard work on adoptions.

Mike Dloogatch noted that the Society of the Study of Amphibians and Reptiles will hold its annual meeting at Indianapolis, Indiana, July 27–31.

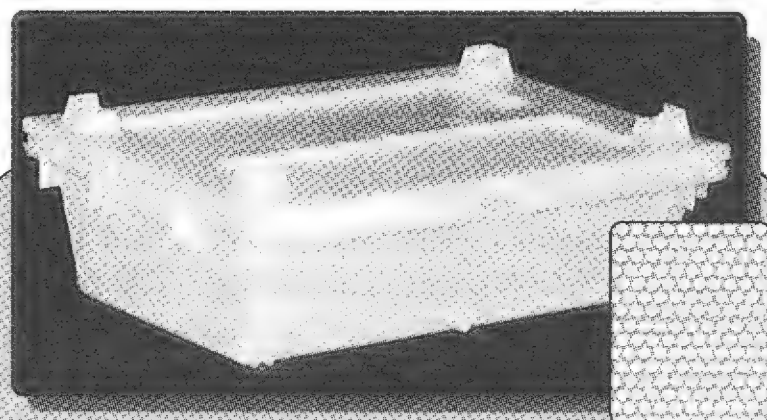
The meeting adjourned at 9:30 P.M.

Respectfully submitted by Michael Redmer for Recording Secretary Emily Forcade

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Highest quality rodents are available in all sizes from pink mice to jumbo rats. Fresh frozen crawler mice are only 17¢ each in lots of 2,000. All frozen animals are shipped in insulated boxes.



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The Tympanum

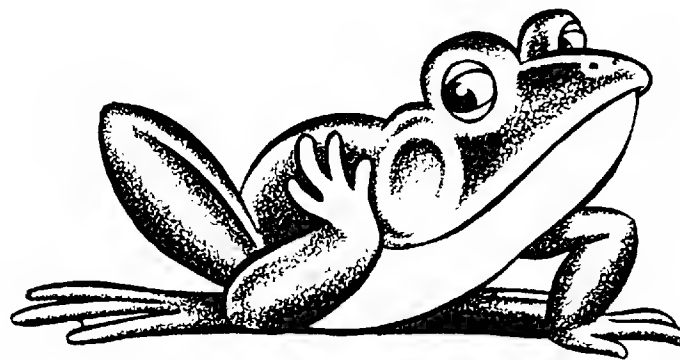
I would like to tell you about a black eye on America's wildlife known as "The Sweetwater Texas Rattlesnake Round-up." To be frank, I am puzzled as to why this type of activity still thrives in the twenty-first century, but since it does, it needs to be addressed. The Sweetwater Texas Jaycees have been at it since 1958, initially to thin out rattlesnake populations, but then it was discovered that there was big money in the event. To perpetuate the roundups, it was attached to the word "charity" and a host of myths.

During the second weekend of every March in the Nolan County Coliseum, the annual Sweetwater Rattlesnake Roundup kicks off with the energy of the Texas State Fair. It brings an estimated 30,000 visitors from around the globe and about five to seven million dollars to the town. It has a carnival midway, food vendors, rattlesnake contests, games, a beauty pageant, dances and live music.

The guests of honor are the 3,000 or so western diamondback rattlesnakes in the snake pit. They are brought in from all over the state of Texas packed in boxes, crates, and garbage cans with no bag limits. Rattlesnakes from Arizona, New Mexico, and Oklahoma have also been brought in, for there is money to be made. Awards for the heaviest haul of snakes are part of the contest and they come in at hundreds of pounds. The snake wranglers and handlers, who are mostly Jaycees, will walk about in the pit as these hapless rattlesnakes try to hide under each other in huge piles only to be pulled out across the floor with snake hooks to be made a spectacle of. The snakes are taunted and teased into striking at their boots or balloons while the "experts" tell the onlookers amazing rattlesnake facts. After all, it's all about education according to the Jaycees.

When the party is over, the snakes pay the bill. They are milked of their venom in front of the spectators while an expert tells about the medical research and antivenin that will come from it. This is another grand myth. Then it's over to the chopping block where onlookers can cheer on those decapitating the rattlers. Even Miss Snake Charmer from the local beauty pageant whacks a few heads in the slaughterhouse. The snakes are then skinned before the crowd, while their serpentine bodies still move. Snake meat is sold or prepared for eating and the hides go to belts, boots, hatbands and other relics. The money will go to different types of charities and contest winners, and the Jaycees will tell you that Texas will be safer for yet another year. The crowd is also told that there are plenty of western diamondbacks, so they will never be hunted to extinction.

Well, there you have it! Or do you? My contempt for rattlesnake roundups goes back to 1967. The raw video footage that I have from the Sweetwater Roundup will sicken anyone with a conservation ethic. It is my wish to expose the real underlying nature of the rattlesnake roundup and bring to you the reader, the plain and honest truth about the environmental damage, the inhumane conditions, and the dangerous condition of the eco-



system that the rattlesnake lives in.

What is far more unnerving to me is the way the Texas Parks and Wildlife Department (TPWD) handles this natural resource. How any state-run administration can let their wildlife heritage be exploited and treated this inhumanely is beyond human comprehension.

The reason for my deep involvement is that I believe rattlesnakes are amazing animals deserving of more consideration. Unfortunately, I could never get what I truly wanted from most herpetological groups. The information was always the same and every-so-often, a petition to stop the roundup would come around and I'd sign it with everyone else. It would get sent to Sweetwater and that would be the end of it. I'm glad that I had the chance to live in Texas and see the roundup for myself. Having relatives in Abilene and the Dallas area also helped, and I came to truly understand the mindset toward rattlesnakes there.

Know this, the Sweetwater Jaycees and the Chamber of Commerce know every politically correct answer if it's about the rattlesnake roundup. I've seen them stump young or uneducated reptile lovers and they are well used to threats and boycotts. Keep this in mind. They have had over forty years of practice.

Other than roundup tradition, sponsors are the big force behind Sweetwater's roundup, and they don't come any bigger than Coors Brewing Company of Golden, Colorado. The Bill Reed Distributor in Abilene sponsors the event every year. Their ads are all over the town and in the paper, proclaiming "Coors, Proud Sponsors of the Sweetwater Jaycees Rattlesnake Round-up." I really wonder if they're proud of their product being associated with an event that will snuff out the lives of 3,000 animals in a single weekend, wreaking havoc on the ecosystem and perpetuating myths about rattlesnakes. Or do they even care?

What lies inside the Nolan County Coliseum is a horrendous spectacle. Misinformation about rattlesnakes is rampant and the smell of the snake pit is horrendous. It's quite common to see dead rattlesnakes in with the live ones. After all, they were crammed and packed into wooden crates for weeks prior to the event. The animals defecate and regurgitate and then you realize why there are boxes of deodorant close by. The chopping and skinning pit is a bloody mess. Buckets full of wriggling snakeheads and trashcans full of entrails are part of the show. The health department must be looking the other way during this event. People in white overcoats are blood splattered and seem to be having a great time while the visitors gawk inside this Chamber of Horrors. Oh, and let's not forget the "Research Pit" joint venture set up between the Sweetwater Jaycees and TPWD inside Nolan County Coliseum. How's that for ironic?

Questioning the sponsorship, I notified Coors and had a pleasant conversation with a representative. After a few minutes of describing a rattlesnake roundup, she was very surprised and

said she would forward my concerns to the distributor and those in charge of field operations. I followed up with a rather large packet of information and pictures on roundups in the mail. My angle was to see if Coors would get out of the roundup due to the slaughterhouse atmosphere and the cruelty dished out on wild animals.

Sadly, animal cruelty issues did not work with Coors. They are hounded by PETA, and other animal rights groups because of what rodeos do to bulls, horses and other livestock. Wildlife conservation and management groups have pleaded with them as well, but to no avail. I received a thank-you letter in January 1999 from Coors for the information and giving them a chance to look into the matter. The letter even said that they take animal welfare issues seriously. Well that was news to me. This is when I started getting the runaround from Coors and I expected it. They even told me they're not responsible for what their distributors choose to support. Follow the money trail. After months of phone calls and mailing out more roundup packets, I finally struck pay dirt. Charles Hughes, General Manager for the Bill Reed Distributor in Abilene, sent me a letter dated November 1999. Gee, only 11 months to get some type of action.

During this time frame, Bill Reed Distributors sent my concerns to Ken Becker, Vice President of the Sweetwater Chamber of Commerce and to Jaycees President Ron Bewely. I had yet to contact these gentlemen, but they both responded with nice letters filled with their typical rhetoric and the same incorrect nonsense about the great services they provided for the community. They never once addressed the damaging actions of the roundups that I made crystal clear in my other letters.

Mr. Hughes told me they would continue to sponsor the rattlesnake roundup and Sweetwater, but would decline sponsorship benefits inside Nolan County Coliseum. That means no advertising of Coors in the coliseum period. Of course they advertise every place else and claim that they are only interested in sponsoring the dances and the chili cook-off. I believe that sponsoring spin-off events makes Coors guilty by association. At least it's a small victory for all of us, and true to their word, Coors didn't advertise in the coliseum.

The action Coors took was a small but positive step. However, it did make those who support the roundup a bit angry. About a week before roundup time, I E-mailed a letter to the editor of the local newspaper, the *Sweetwater Reporter*. It ran and I was a bit surprised. Its message was anti-roundup and it disproved some of the garbage they had been dishing out to the public for decades. I couldn't help but to mention Coors and their decision in the coliseum. It's only fair to say that the *Sweetwater Reporter* will print anyone's viewpoint.

Next let's look at TPWD's stance on the roundups. Here is their mission statement: "*To manage and conserve the natural and cultural resources of Texas for the use and enjoyment of present and future generations.*"

We have already established that the roundups are an ecologically irresponsible act, driven by fear. But it bothered me for years that this type of activity continued under the watch of TPWD. No bag limits, rampant den gassing, inhumane treat-

ment and the environmental damage perpetrated for over forty years! Now, look at that mission statement again. The plain truth is that rattlesnake roundups and wildlife management don't mix. Actually the roundups should be banned completely.

In October 1999, I received two documents in the mail that are extremely difficult to obtain. One is the infamous Western Diamondback Rattlesnake Statewide Population & Harvest Estimates. TPWD Wildlife Biologist Bill Del Monte prepared this on July 19, 1992. The other document is the Sweetwater Rattlesnake Roundup Annual Report for 1994 to 1999. It was published from a joint venture between the Sweetwater Jaycees in cooperation with TPWD. It consists of the findings of the Research Pit Program where random, and I mean random, samples of rattlesnakes are measured, sexed and weighed before slaughter. Counties are also listed where the snakes were captured. This is supposed to monitor populations of rattlesnakes on a statewide level. The Sweetwater Jaycees will tell you that the information is given at no charge to TPWD.

I guess that begs the big question. Why aren't there Research Pit Programs at the other roundups in Texas? TPWD doesn't have the funding. But wait a second, the Sweetwater Jaycees aren't charging TPWD. Surely other groups or roundups can do the same. The research is based on what TPWD requested, and the other roundups were left out of it completely. One has to wonder how many rattlesnakes vanished in Freer, Taylor, Mathis, Cleburne, Brownwood, Big Springs, and Jacksboro, Texas.

Just to let you know up front, I'm not a wildlife biologist, but I'm also not an idiot. And after reviewing these two documents, I just shook my head and wondered how TPWD could even sanction this information. They never even bothered to question those in charge of these findings or even question the data. It must be tradition. The Harvest Estimates were shown to wildlife biologists here in Arizona so I could get some input. They couldn't get the picture either and were a bit amused at the information. In short, rattlesnake populations were grossly exaggerated. Try 20 million rattlesnakes roaming in Texas. As of today, TPWD thinks it may have a million or more rattlesnakes, but they don't have the funding to find out. When the harvest estimate was made public in Texas, it did something to further the mindset already in place and added fuel to an already raging fire. Alas, the diamondback could now be hunted with reckless abandon.

This brings me to the issue of gasoline and its usage on rattlesnakes. Gassing rattlesnakes from dens and hide areas in Texas is a part of the roundup tradition. Hunters have been using it for years to drive rattlesnakes out into the open. The poor dazed creatures are captured and then put into trashcans, crates, bags and lockers like sardines for weeks at a time. No wonder dead and dying rattlesnakes are commonly seen in the snake pit.

The Sweetwater Jaycees enjoy gassing and they even have a "show and tell" around press time, which educates the novice on how to use a pump sprayer with a hose and nozzle. They even demonstrate the technique. But wait, isn't it against the law in Texas to use gas in this fashion?

The state of Texas contracted Dr. Campbell and Dr. Brodie at the University of Texas—Arlington as to their research on the effects of gasoline and gas fumes on den inhabitants. TPWD has the findings of the research and let's just say it was downright scary and deadly. Did I leave out toxic as well? Please ask for a copy, but you may need to use the Freedom of Information Act to get it.

According to the Texas Water Commission (TWC) it's prohibited to introduce any deleterious substance into the ground—period. Well, great! That's a load off of my mind! Now how are the Sweetwater Jaycees getting away with using gasoline on rattlesnakes and showing others how it's done? It's another loophole on TPWD's part and no enforcement from TWC.

A violation of Texas Water Commission laws is not a violation of TPWD law. The game wardens and staff can only enforce TPWD laws. Someone else has to enforce TWC laws. TPWD can only enforce it if there is a comparable law in the TPWD code.

While they have no authority over environmental quality, TPWD could prohibit the use of gasoline in rattlesnake dens as a means of protecting nontarget wildlife, and that would be allowed under their authority. This is how most diamondbacks are caught in early spring throughout Texas. But they're not enforcing the law upon Texas tradition it seems because no one has ever been convicted or fined.

TPWD and TWC know how dangerous gasoline is to humans, wildlife and water sources. You would think that there would be some type of platform for interagency cooperation, or at least a format for one agency notifying another when, in the course of fulfilling its duty, the agency finds laws governed by another being broken, or a reasonable suspicion that they are. Can you say accountability?

It would appear that Texas environmental agencies do not view the spilling or spraying of a few ounces of gas to be worth their effort to enforce. Well then how about a gallon? Gasoline kills and destroys wildlife. What part don't they understand?

Gasoline is always out of hunting season and that issue needs to be closed with law enforcement. The Sweetwater Jaycees and Texas snake hunters who use gas, whether it's one ounce or three gallons are breaking the law somewhere and that's the bottom line!

Mr. John Herron of TPWD told me that he has notified the environmental agencies in the past, but he is not aware of anyone being cited or jailed for gassing rattlesnakes, even though it's against TWC law. What makes it more difficult to enforce is the fact that a TPWD warden has to actually see someone gassing a den. Most of the snakes are captured on private property and out of sight. Add that to the size of Texas and the limited number of TPWD officials and there you have it. This practice has been going on for over forty years without an arrest or a conviction, so it has to make you wonder if no enforcement and no accountability rule the roost anyway.

In my last E-mail from Mr. Herron, he told me they have addressed the Sweetwater Jaycees about the gassing issue. But it's unlikely that the Texas State Commission is going to ap-

prove any new regulations until TPWD has tried to resolve the issue in a cooperative manner. They have made it very clear that they consider regulation to be the last resort. TPWD won't meet again to address this issue till next year.

I believe it's sad that we will have to wait another year before anything is addressed to this problem, let alone any type of regulations that could possibly come into existence. TPWD must make a simple law in the regulations. Make gasoline illegal as a method of take when hunting rattlesnakes or other wildlife, plain and simple. I suppose this begs the question. Would the numbers of rattlesnakes showing up in Sweetwater be reduced, if gasoline usage was banned and enforced? It wouldn't surprise me at all.

While I don't have all the answers, I believe that there are some good suggestions and ideas that TPWD and Sweetwater, Texas, need to look into and act upon. Gassing of dens occurs to this day because it is the easiest way to capture large numbers of animals and no law enforcement seems to be implemented. This must be stopped. Also, bring on bag limits. Regulate the numbers of animals being taken. That would be a good start and I would be happy with it.

Finally, there must be something addressed to the cruel, barbaric, and incomprehensible way rattlesnakes are treated at roundups. In a nutshell they're teased, prodded, poked, kicked, gassed, sacked, cramped, stretched, thrown, slammed, milked, and then beheaded. This is wildlife management and education at work here in Sweetwater and other roundups, as sanctioned by TPWD.

Attitudes, tradition, and culture towards rattlesnakes are a moot point for TPWD. Animal rights groups and humane societies have tried to reason with roundups. Small children and adults get a dose of overkill and become desensitized to the brutality placed on wildlife at roundups. They figure that it's all right to do this to wildlife and both young and old get a twisted view. This is so wrong!

Mr. Herron stated that the TPWD authority to regulate based on humane treatment is limited . . . not that it doesn't matter. There is no mention of humane treatment or animal welfare in the law. TPWD officials must use established rules and regulations. Animal welfare isn't one of the yardsticks allowed for use under Parks and Wildlife code.

I am left to wonder if the heart, soul and conscience of the Texas State Commission and TPWD is seared over to the outright blood lust venture that is the rattlesnake roundup. It's time to throw that type of logic out the window because it is morally reprehensible.

There is a very serious moral aspect between rattlesnake roundups and hunting. While hunters shoot to kill outright for harvesting, roundups do the opposite. Rattlesnakes don't get the luxury of a quick death at the hands of the Sweetwater Jaycees or other roundup proponents. The snakes are paraded all over the place, made sport of, and are also deprived of food, water, and space for several months. Decapitation is inhumane for rattlesnakes. The brain activity continues for about an hour after the head has been severed.

Lee Fitzgerald at Texas A&M and Charlie Painter of the New Mexico Game & Fish Department have called out for stopping the cruelty meted out against the rattlesnake at roundups. Making fun of wildlife and mistreating live animals do not fit into a wildlife conservation model any more than does unregulated commercialization. I totally agree with them. So what's it going to be, TPWD? How about it, Sweetwater?

A passage in the Bible seems to sum it all up about the actions carried out by rattlesnake roundups and the people involved:

Proverbs 19:16-19

There are six things, which the Lord hates, yes seven which are an abomination to Him:

Haughty eyes, a lying tongue, and hands that shed innocent blood,
A heart that devises wicked plans, feet that run rapidly to evil,
A false witness who utters lies and one who spreads strife among brothers.

Yes, I'm tired of the lies, butchery, misinformation, illegal activities, and the ruthlessness of these Roman circuses held in America. It is no more than a cancerous blight on our wildlife heritage that must be eliminated.

Proverbs 12:10

A righteous man cares for the life of his beast.

I would hope that some wisdom and common sense for proper wildlife management might come about for this misunderstood reptile. The western diamondback rattlesnake deserves it, and

they owe it to all of us. While I show my emotional side in this article, cool heads will have to prevail if anything is to be done to change the laws and regulations for better management and humane treatment of this reptile. Keep your passion in check, but never lose your compassion for what is right.

Sweetwater, Texas, and other roundup towns must change with the times and learn from the past. Their economy has been fashioned securely to the rattlesnake roundup and its assorted paraphernalia for over forty years. At one time, the feathers of the snowy egret neatly adorned the hats of 1800s era women. Eventually, there were a lot of bird catchers that had to find other jobs. Must history repeat itself?

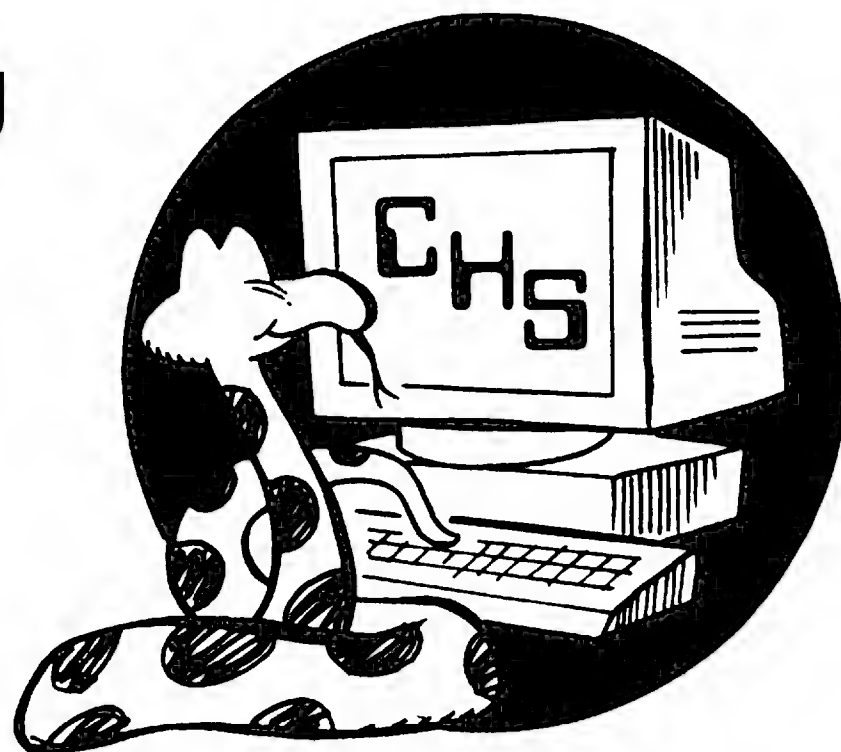
To continue in this irresponsible practice will bring about wildlife bankruptcy. As it is, Sweetwater and the like are already in a financial rut being dependent on the rattlesnake roundup. A rut is a grave with both ends kicked out. TPWD needs to look at the big picture and how the rest of America looks at them and their handling of this barbaric event. Whether TPWD likes it or not, rattlesnake roundups are a national embarrassment. The ultimate truth is, wildlife conservation and humane treatment will never fit into the agenda of a rattlesnake roundup and the only answer will be total elimination of roundups. **Dale Burton, Director, Rattlesnake Awareness Programs of Arizona, 9720 N. 45th Avenue, Glendale AZ 85302, E-mail: MojaveHiss@gateway.net.**

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For sale: Frozen rodents now available at the General Meeting! Just another good reason to come to the meetings at the Chicago Academy of Sciences Patty Notebaert Nature Museum. Assorted sizes of rats and mice. Call Rich Crowley at (708) 485-5705 for details and pricing.

For sale: rats and mice—pinkies, fuzzies and adults. Quantity discounts. Please send a SASE for pricelist or call Bill Brant, *THE GOURMET RODENT*, 6115 SW 137th Avenue, Archer FL 32618, (352) 495-9024, E-mail: GrmtRodent@aol.com.

For sale: murine-pathogen-free rats and mice available in all sizes, live or frozen: pinkies, fuzzies, crawlers, small, medium and large. Frozen crawler mice in lots of 2000, \$.17 each. Also available, full grown hairless mice. FOB shipping point. Master Card accepted. Call (518) 537-2000 between 8:00 A.M. and 5:00 P.M. or write SAS Corporation, 273 Hover Avenue, Germantown NY 12526 for prices and additional information.

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For sale: from Bayou Rodents, excellent quality feeder mice and rats. Every size available. Pinks starting at \$20/100. Orders are shipped by overnight service Monday thru Thursday. We accept Visa, MasterCard and Discover. For more info, contact Rhonda or Peggy, (800) 722-6102.

For sale: **high quality frozen feeders**. Over a decade of production and supply. Seven sizes of mice available: small newborn pinks up to jumbo adults. Prices start at \$25 per 100. Feeders are separate in the resealable bag, not frozen together. Low shipping rates. Free price list. Kelly Haller, 4236 SE 25th Street, Topeka KS 66605, (913) 234-3358 evenings and weekends.

For sale: My loss, your gain. Entire collection, racks/cages included. No reasonable offers refused. I am ready to sell. Reason for selling, losing/lost interest. Must sell snakes before racks and cages are sold. Four 7-month-old ball pythons, eating and great health, \$35 each; one male and one female c.b. '97 poss. het albino Colombian boas (never bred), \$300; one male and one female c.b. '98 (related) het albino Colombian boas, female is average, male is a beauty, \$550; one male and one female c.b. '96 Madagascar tree boas, gorgeous green, black & white (related & never bred) \$2500; one male and two female c.b. '97 (proven) breeding trio of corns, \$175; one female c.b. '97 Pueblan milksnake, \$50; one male and one female c.b. '97 (related) patternless northern pines (never bred), \$350; one male c.b. '96 high definition northern pine (gorgeous proven), \$100; one female c.b. '96 albino northern pine (beautiful proven), \$100; one male and one female c.b. '96 b/w high white kings (ready this fall never bred), \$140; one male c.b. '97 black king (*nitida* phase, never bred) \$35; one male c.b. '98 anerythristic corn \$35; one male and one female c.b. '97 het for hypo *splendidas* \$200. Some Animals from Steve Snow, Diversified Genetics; Madagascars are from Steve Hammack H.I.S.S. Buyer pays shipping. If interested please call Mike at (815) 547-9472. I live in the Rockford, Illinois, area, if you are interested in picking anything up. I would consider a cash/trade as well.

For sale: **now taking reservations for c.b. 2001 aberrant garter snake offspring**: Following are expected to be produced this year: **easterns**—Blais Flames (speckled, \$125 each, red & orange phase, \$50–125 each, peach phase, \$50 each), anerythristics, \$175 each, hets, \$50 each; Florida blues (not *similis*), \$10–50 each, melanistic, \$35 each, erythristic (2 strains): erythristic × Blais flame and erythristic × melanistic, \$50–100 each; **plains**—Snows (2 strains), \$375 each, hets, \$175 each, red-albino (double hets), \$150 each; albinos (2 strains), \$125 each, hets, \$50 each, anerythristics, \$100 each, hets \$50 each; possible het plains (66% chance of being possibly het for albino, anerythristic or snow), \$35 each, normals, \$25 each or 2 for \$40; red-sideds—Anerythristic, \$100 each (hets, \$50 each and possible hets, \$35 each), normals, \$25 each/2 for \$40; **wandering**—Het albinos, \$75 each, normals, \$25 each/2 for \$40 & more. Please call (919) 934-0110, E-mail: Sirtalis01@aol.com website: <http://www.thamnophis.com/features/ScottFelzer>.

For sale: Brazilian rainbow boas—screaming red & orange babies, only five left, \$125; “starburst” woma python—pick of the litter male, outstanding animal, \$1250; 3½' female Argentine boa, \$150; 4' striped male African rock python, \$150; Pueblan milksnakes, c.b. '00, \$35. All animals are captive born and are feeding on prekilled rodents. Mark Petros, Strictly Serpents, (847) 854-3259, E-mail: turbovixens1@prodigy.net.

For sale: Send SASE to CRC, P.O. Box 0731, Las Vegas NV 89125-0731 for brochures and list of species available. Limited bookings available for guided tours of herpetological collection sites in Nevada. Call/fax (702) 450-0065. URL <http://www.herp.com/crc/> E-mail: crsafetie@aol.com.

Tours: Adventure tours to Madagascar! Join **Bill Love** seeing and photographing fauna and flora, heavily herp-biased, across the world's least known mini-continent. Maximum fun & photo ops assured on every trip. Contact him at: BLUE CHAMELEON VENTURES, P.O. Box 643, Alva FL 33920. TEL: (941) 728-2390, FAX: (941) 728-3276, E-mail: blove@cyberstreet.com.

Tours: **Road-riding in Costa Rica!** Treat yourself to the trip of a lifetime! Learn about tropical herps, find them, photograph them, see where they live. **Greentracks, Inc.**, offers the best herpetological tours led by internationally acclaimed herpetologists and herpetoculturists. See the Amazon, visit cloud forests, experience the world's greatest rainforest, super sunsets and good company. Call (800) 9-MONKEY.

Wanted: Aberrant/unusual garter snakes. Scott, (919) 934-0110, or E-mail: Sirtalis01@aol.com.

Wanted: west Florida reptile collector would like to hear from other reptile collectors from all parts of the U.S. to trade, buy, sell reptiles of all types. Tony Picheo, 11080 lillian Hiway, Pensacola FL 32506, (850) 453-8133.

Wanted: big-headed turtles; mata mata turtles; Mexican giant mud turtles (*Staurotypus triporcatus*); exceptionally large common snappers (45 lbs. & up); large alligator snappers (over 90 lbs.); spectacled caiman from Trinidad, Tobago and Surinam; dwarf caiman; smooth-fronted caiman; albino turtles (except red-eared sliders). Walt Loose, (610) 926-6028, 9:00 A.M. – 1:00 P.M. or after 11:30 P.M. Eastern Time.

Line ads in this publication are run free for CHS members — \$2 per line for nonmembers. Any ad may be refused at the discretion of the Editor. Submit ads to: Michael Dloogatch, 6048 N. Lawndale Avenue, Chicago IL 60659, (773) 588-0728 evening telephone, (312) 782-2868 fax, E-mail: [<MADadder0@aol.com>](mailto:MADadder0@aol.com).

News and Announcements

INTERNATIONAL HERPETOLOGICAL SYMPOSIUM —25TH ANNIVERSARY MEETING

The 25th annual meeting of the International Herpetological Symposium will be held July 14-17, 2001, at the Hotel Ponchartrain Detroit, Michigan. The theme for this year's gathering is "Captive Propagation and Conservation Biology: Past, Present and Future." The keynote speaker will be Tony Pooley, "43 Years of Crocodile Farming." The banquet speaker will be Jay Savage, "Costa Rican Herpetofauna." Other scheduled speakers and their topics are: Eugene Bessette, "The Dream (Herpetoculture)"; Alan Botterman, "Dry Goods Industry Perspective on Herpetoculture"; Kelly Bradley, "Cuban False Chameleon Husbandry"; Jon Coote, "View from the Past — Victorian Herpetoculture"; Ed DeGraw, "Arboreal Alligator Lizards"; Nathan Dunstan, "Management of a Taipan, *Oxyuranus microlepidotus*, Colony for Venom Extraction"; David Fabius, "South American Snake-necked Turtles"; Glen Gerber, "Caribbean Rock Iguana Research and Conservation"; Dr. Barry Gold, "Exotic Snake Envenomation Problem and Treatment"; David Grow, "Developing a New State-of-the-art Herp Facility"; Bill McCord/Patrick Baker, "Asian *Cuora* Husbandry and Reproduction"; Bob Meyer, "American Rattlesnake Museum"; Tim Nias, "Captive Propagation and Double Clutching in Inland Taipans, *Oxyuranus microlepidotus*"; Charlie Painter, "Ecology of *Crotalus willardi* in the Southwest"; Jim Pether, "New Lacertid Lizard from Gomera"; Louis Porras, "Rattlesnakes of the Colorado Plateau"; Allen Repashy, "Large-scale Breeding — Sandfire Dragon Ranch"; David Roberts, "Herp Photography"; Scott Stahl, DVM, "Reptile Veterinary Medicine"; John Tashjian, "Herp Mystery Quiz"; Peter Taylor, "*Paleosuchus* Propagation"; Robert Wilkinson, Ph.D., "Hellbenders, Past and Present"; and Robert Zappalorti, "Herping in the Pine Barrens."

Other planned activities are an icebreaker, banquet and auction, a behind-the-scenes tour of the Detroit Zoo National Amphibian Conservation Center and the Holden Museum of Living Reptiles (dinner included), and a herp photo contest with prizes (see IHS website at www.kingsnake.com/ihs for photo contest details).

Registration is \$135 if paid on or before June 14. Send fee to Joe Marek, 10411 Balsamwood Court, Laurel MD 20708-3176. You must make your own hotel reservation directly with the Hotel Ponchartrain Detroit, Two Washington Boulevard, Detroit MI 48226-4416, (313) 965-0200 or (877) 965-0200. For general information, contact Stan Draper, P.O. Box 16444, Salt Lake City, UT 84116, E-mail: sdraper@home.com.

ANNUAL HERPETOLOGY MEETING

All herpetologists, professional and amateur, are invited to the joint annual meeting of the Society for the Study of Amphibians and Reptiles (SSAR) and the Herpetologists' League (HL), July 27–31, 2001, hosted by the Indiana University-Purdue University at Indianapolis.

Location: University Place Conference Center and Hotel, 850 West Michigan Street, Indianapolis, Indiana 46202-5198. For reservations: <http://www.universityplace.iupui.edu/contact/> or (800) 627-2700.

Registration: By March 30, Student \$175; Regular \$240, after March, Student \$200; Regular \$295

Special academic activities: A lecture by HL's Distinguished Herpetologist for 2001, Dr. Bill Branch, Curator of Herpetology, Port Elizabeth Museum, South Africa; A Symposium on "Amphibian Population Declines" organized by David M. Green and Karen Lips; A symposium on "Herpetological Research in Zoos: The Academic Connection," organized by John D. Groves and Hugh R. Quinn; Keynote address by George B. Rabb. This Symposium is dedicated to the memory of Sherman A. Minton, M.D.

Several concurrent Contributed Paper and Poster Presentations will be held each day. Special events include: a Bar-B-Que dinner followed by an auction of herpetological merchandise; a slide show featuring the photographs of David Dennis and Eric Jutterbock; a **live** collection of amphibians and reptiles of Indiana. To learn more about the meeting visit the SSAR web page at <http://www.ukans.edu/~ssar/SSAR.html>. For registration materials contact Dr. Henry Mushinsky at: Mushinsk@chum1.cas.usf.edu, or by phone (813) 974-5218, or by mail to: Department of Biology, University of South Florida, Tampa, FL 33620.

News and Announcements (cont'd)

BEHIND THE SCENES AT THE TOLEDO ZOO

The Chicago Herpetological Society is sponsoring a bus trip to the Toledo Zoo. We will be treated to a behind-the-scenes tour of the reptile exhibits and an inside look at the research being conducted at the zoo. You will have the opportunity to visit other parts of the zoo at your leisure.

May 19, 2001: Leave Chicago at 5:00 A.M. – return to Chicago approximately 11:00 P.M.; \$35 per person. Seats are limited, so don't delay.

Bus is equipped with washroom facilities and VCR. Meet/Park on N. Pulaski near Ardmore (5800 North – between Bryn Mawr and Peterson Avenues).

For more information contact Char Haguewood – (708) 209-1426 (after 7:00 P.M.) or CharlynLou@aol.com.

While space remains on the bus, you can sign up and pay for the trip at the March and April monthly meetings or send check or money order made payable to CHS to:

Chicago Herpetological Society
Toledo Zoo Trip
2060 N. Clark Street
Chicago, IL 60614.

NEW PET SHOP POSTERS

In 2000, Illinois enacted legislation requiring pet shops to prominently post information about safe reptile handling practices in each location where the animals are displayed or housed and to provide anyone purchasing or receiving a reptile with the information. The law (P.A. 91-0741), which amended the state's Animal Welfare Act, charged the Illinois Department of Public Health (IDPH) with developing these materials.

The new law was prompted by the growing recognition that persons may acquire *Salmonella* infection from reptiles. *Salmonella* can produce diarrhea, abdominal cramping and fever in infected persons. The informational posters and flyers developed by IDPH provide important information about ways reptile owners can minimize their exposure to *Salmonella* bacteria.

In January 2001, IDPH sent copies of the poster and flyer to all licensed pet shops in Illinois. Additional copies of these materials can be obtained from local health departments or from IDPH, Division of Infectious Diseases, 525 W. Jefferson Street, Springfield, IL 62761. If you have questions about *Salmonella* infection or about its transmission by reptiles, contact this division at (217) 785-7165, TTY (hearing impaired use only) (800) 547-0466.



UPCOMING MEETINGS

The next meeting of the Chicago Herpetological Society will be held at 7:30 P.M., Wednesday, March 28, at the Peggy Notebaert Nature Museum, Cannon Drive and Fullerton Parkway, in Chicago. **Ron Humbert** and **Mike Redmer** will present an overview of native as well as exotic amphibians, starting with those found in your backyard and including some from as far away as the jungles of Borneo. Included will be a number of “before and after” photo pairs, showing larvae and their adult forms.

Dr. Peter C. H. Pritchard, renowned turtle expert and author, will speak at the April 25 meeting. His topic will be “The Search for the World’s Largest Freshwater Turtle.”

The regular monthly meetings of the Chicago Herpetological Society now take place at Chicago’s newest museum—the **Peggy Notebaert Nature Museum**. This beautiful new building is at Fullerton Parkway and Cannon Drive, directly across Fullerton from the Lincoln Park Zoo. Meetings are held the last Wednesday of each month, from 7:30 P.M. through 9:30 P.M. Parking is free on Cannon Drive. A plethora of CTA buses stop nearby.

The Chicago Turtle Club

The next meeting of the Chicago Turtle Club will be Sunday, April 29, 1:00 – 3:30 P.M., at the North Park Village Nature Center, 5801 N. Pulaski, in Chicago (the March meeting was held early this month to avoid a conflict with ReptileFest). Meetings are informal; questions, children and animals are welcome. Parking is free. For more info call Lisa Koester, (773) 508-0034, or visit the CTC website: <http://www.geocities.com/~chicagoturtle>.

SALAMANDER SAFARI

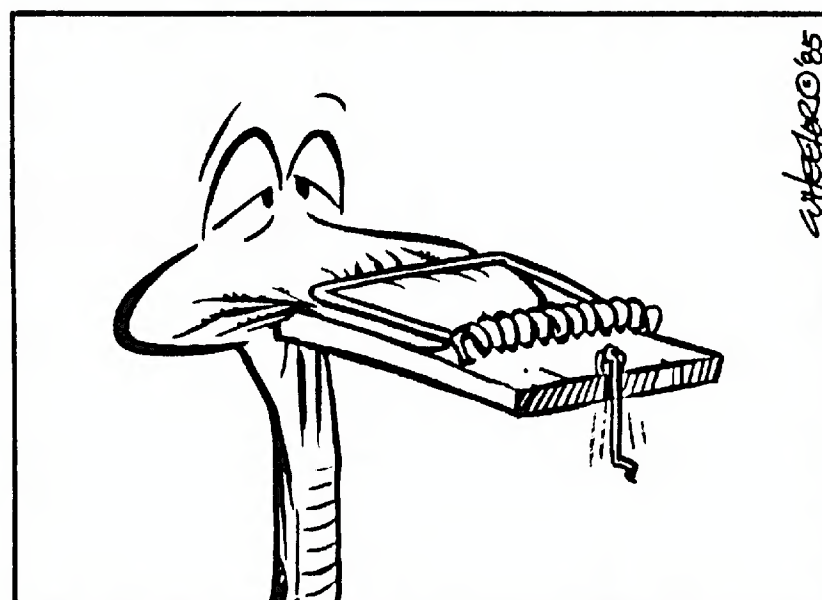
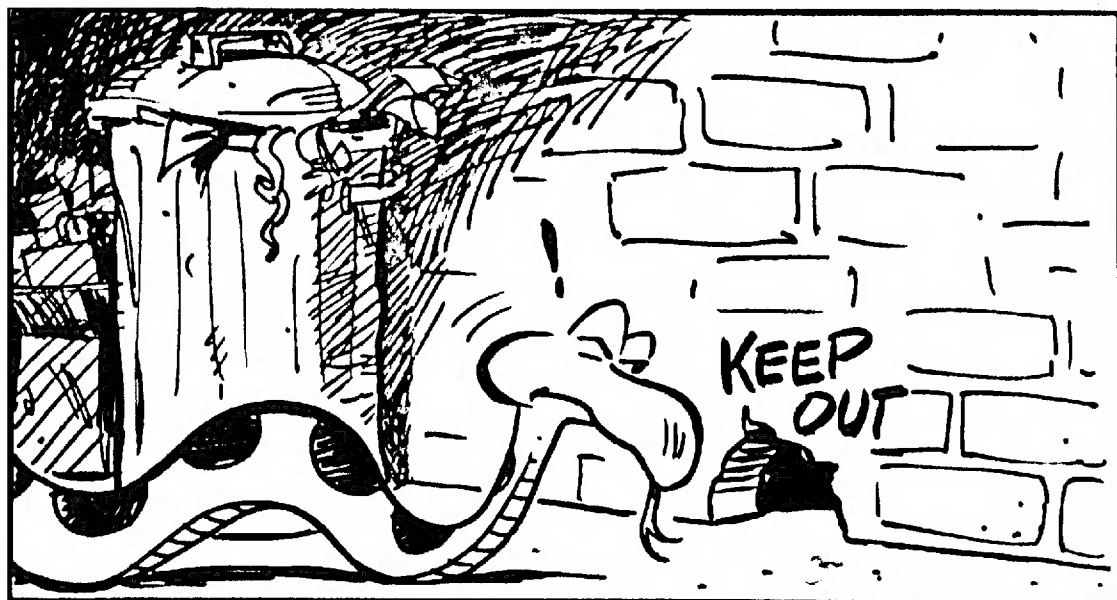
On Saturday, March 31, the Chicago Herpetological Society will hold its annual Salamander Safari. This outing gives CHS members and their families and friends a chance to see herps, mostly amphibians, newly emerged from their winter dormancy. The emphasis is on amphibians and we usually find all four local salamander species and a few anurans as well. Viewing and photography are permitted, collecting is not. We encourage you to bring live or preserved amphibians from your personal collections. Terrarium set-ups, if not too large, can also be displayed. The event will begin at beautiful Camp Sagawau located at 12545 W. 111th Street (Route 83), in Lemont, Illinois. Traveling south on Route 83 from I-55, follow Route 83 to the left (east) at the point where Archer Avenue branches off to the right. Go about 100 yards to see the camp entrance on the left. Park in the designated parking lot and walk to the main building where we will begin at 8:30 A.M. Field trips to different areas within a 5-mile radius will embark during the day. Doughnuts, juice and coffee will be available. Bring clothing and footgear suitable for the weather. We’ll be walking in some wetland areas. Snacks, cameras and field guides are an option. A good time and an educational experience is guaranteed. If you have any questions, call Ron Humbert at (630) 620-7377.

DONATIONS TO THE JANUARY 31 RAFFLE

The following is a listing of those businesses and individuals who generously donated items for our monthly raffle at the January 31 meeting. The donated items are shown in parentheses.

Midwest Zoological Research (NutriBACdf supplement); **Fauna** (*Fauna* magazine); **Sunshine Mealworms** (cricket gift certificate); **Super Pet** (Hanging Gardens cage decor / rock pool cover / ceramic dish / Island Sanctuary); **ZooMed** (iguana food); **Tetra** (ReptoMin food stix / Reptovit supplement); **Lixit** (reptile waterer); **Hagen** (Repti-por deodorizer); **Terry Vandeventer** (autographed poster: Venomous Snakes of Mississippi); **Lori King** (art glass lizard); **Karen Bielski** (frog toothbrush holder); **Charlotte Henkle** (heat mat & rheostat / light & fixture / ceramic dish / grape vine cage decor); **Ron & Dotty Humbert** (herp posters / aquarium); **CHS** (T-shirts / herp hat).

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